

# **“Our language is the forest”: Landscapes of the Mother Tongue in David Greig’s *Dunsinane***

*Kathryn Vomero Santos, Trinity University*

## **ABSTRACT**

Tracing early visits to and excavations of Dunsinane Hill in Perthshire, Scotland, this essay argues that Shakespeare and the overpowering legacy of his “Scottish play” have left an imprint that is both ecological and ideological. Situated within broader conversations about cultural heritage, literary tourism, colonialism, and nationalism, my analysis of Shakespeare’s indelible mark on Dunsinane Hill — as a place and an idea — provides a theoretical and literal groundwork for understanding how Scottish playwright David Greig activates the territorial lexicon of appropriation in his 2010 play *Dunsinane*. For Greig, the act of appropriation is not just about speaking back to Shakespeare but about doing so on land that was never his and in a language that he never understood in the first place. I show how Greig concentrates the power of his speculative sequel in and around the figure of Gruach (the historical Lady Macbeth), who not only embodies the deeply gendered relationship between language and landscape but also reclaims that relationship in order to critique the longstanding and devastating colonial conflation of women’s bodies, mother tongues, and the land itself.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the base of Dunsinane Hill in Perthshire, Scotland, sits a weathered informational sign (Figure 1) created by the Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust that bears the interrogative title “Dunsinnan Hill-fort . . . Macbeth’s castle?”<sup>1</sup> This question, made all the more tentative and dramatic by the insertion of an ellipsis, captures a palpable tension between the overpowering legacy of “the Scottish play” that has brought curious Bardolators to this site for centuries and the difficulty of recovering information about the activities that actually transpired on this land.



**Figure 1.** Placard at the base of Dunsinane Hill. Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust.

*Photograph by Kathryn Vomero Santos.*

Greeting the visitors that stand before it, the placard seems at first dutifully to quote the prophetic lines from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* about "Great Birnam Wood" coming to "high Dunsinane Hill" (4.1.92), but it is quick to note that this site has a much longer, if fragmentary, history as a hillfort dating back at least to the Iron Age with additional evidence of use by "prehistoric people" around 4000–2000 BC. Such history has been largely obscured, however, by the mythology surrounding the play's eponymous eleventh-century king of Scotland. "The presumed connection with Macbeth," the placard explains, "led early antiquarians to carry out major excavations in 1799 and 1854," but such "unscientific 'digs' produced conflicting and confusing records and greatly disturbed the site. The various mounds and ditches within the fort are the remains of the trenches and up-cast of those early explorers."

Invoking Juliet's infamous onomastic query—"What's in a name?" (2.2.43)—the sign goes on to point out that, much like the landscape itself, the spelling and pronunciation of the hill's moniker have been irrevocably altered by the popularity of Shakespeare's tragedy, a consequence that American travel writer John McPhee recorded in a piece for *The New Yorker* when he spoke to a local farmer named Donald Sinclair during his "pilgrimage" to Dunsinane from Birnam Wood: "Few people seem to realize that there really is a Dunsinane Hill. Shakespeare, he said, took an 'n' out of Dunsinnan and added an 'e,' but did not create the hill" (McPhee 1970, 144). Echoing a similar sentiment, the Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust sign reflects a larger spirit of resistance that reluctantly embraces a longstanding interest in the cultural capital and global tourism industry generated by the legacy of Shakespeare while calling attention to the political, linguistic, and ecological scars this legacy has left behind. Tellingly, the sign concludes with a list of rules that includes requests to "respect the local flora [sic] and fauna" as well as "the lifestyles of the local people." While Dunsinane is decidedly not

an example of the “commodified heritage” that Dennis Kennedy has observed in Shakespearean festivals and birthplace tourism, and it is not nearly as popular a destination as other famous places associated with Shakespeare’s plays, it does present a particularly acute case of the psychic and physical damage caused by what Robert Ormsby has termed “literary pilgrimage” to the sites that Shakespeare once conjured for the early modern English stage (Kennedy 1998, 181; Ormsby 2017, 432).

This essay operates in the elliptical space opened up by the heritage plaque’s provocative punctuation and traces early visits to and excavations of Dunsinane Hill in order to demonstrate that Shakespeare and his “Scottish play” have left an imprint that is both ecological and ideological. Situated within broader conversations about cultural heritage, literary tourism, colonialism, and nationalism, my analysis of Shakespeare’s indelible mark on this site—as a place and an idea— provides a theoretical and literal groundwork for understanding how Scottish playwright David Greig activates the territorial lexicon of appropriation in his 2010 play *Dunsinane*. As it develops a version of what Christy Desmet describes as a dialogical relationship “that involves both sharing and contested ownership” with its Shakespearean source, Greig’s actually Scottish play speculates about the ellipses of history and re-aligns the landscape of Dunsinane and the Gaelic language with the figure of Gruach, the historical Lady Macbeth, who has not died and has a son from her previous marriage with a legitimate claim to the throne (Desmet 2014, 42). Her calculated and performative bilingual interaction with Siward, the monolingual leader of the English army sent to restore peace and oversee Malcolm’s installment on the throne, inverts Shakespeare’s staging of foreign female voices and presents a powerful critique of the longstanding and devastating colonial conflation of women’s bodies, mother tongues, and the land itself. Originally commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and subsequently revived and toured by the recently established National Theatre of Scotland, Greig’s *Dunsinane* indulges audiences’ desires to visit the place made famous by the final act of Shakespeare’s tragedy. But what he shows them when they get there is that they may not be greeted with the warm welcome they expected, and that their presence may, in fact, cause damage to the very site itself.

### EXCAVATING DUNSINANE

In his work on Shakespeare and cultural tourism, Kennedy explains that, in the same way that the “meaning of a performance occurs in the mind of the spectator,” seeing a touristic site “is ultimately a prompt for an event that occurs in the mind of the visitor” (Kennedy 1998, 175). For several late eighteenth-century visitors to Dunsinane Hill and its environs, this mental event was explicitly shaped by their familiarity with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Scotsman Sir John Sinclair, who visited the site at the age of eighteen in 1772, was of the opinion that Shakespeare’s play was “the greatest effort of dramatic genius the world has yet produced” and went so far as to suggest that the playwright himself had visited the site prior to writing *Macbeth* (Sinclair 1831, 454). Sinclair explained his rationale in a letter to the famous actor Edmund Kean, who had recently played the title role:

There is reason to believe that Shakespeare collected materials for “The Tragedy of Macbeth,” on the spot where many of the transactions took place. It is recorded in Guthrie’s History of Scotland, that

Queen Elizabeth sent some English actors to the court of her successor, James, which was then held at Perth; and, it is supposed, that Shakespeare was one of the number. This idea receives strong confirmation by the following striking circumstance. The Castle of Dunsinane is situated about seven or eight miles from Perth. When I examined, some years ago, the remains of that castle, and the scenes in its neighbourhood, I found, that the traditions of the country people were identically the same as the story represented in Shakespeare. (Sinclair 1831, 455, emphasis original)

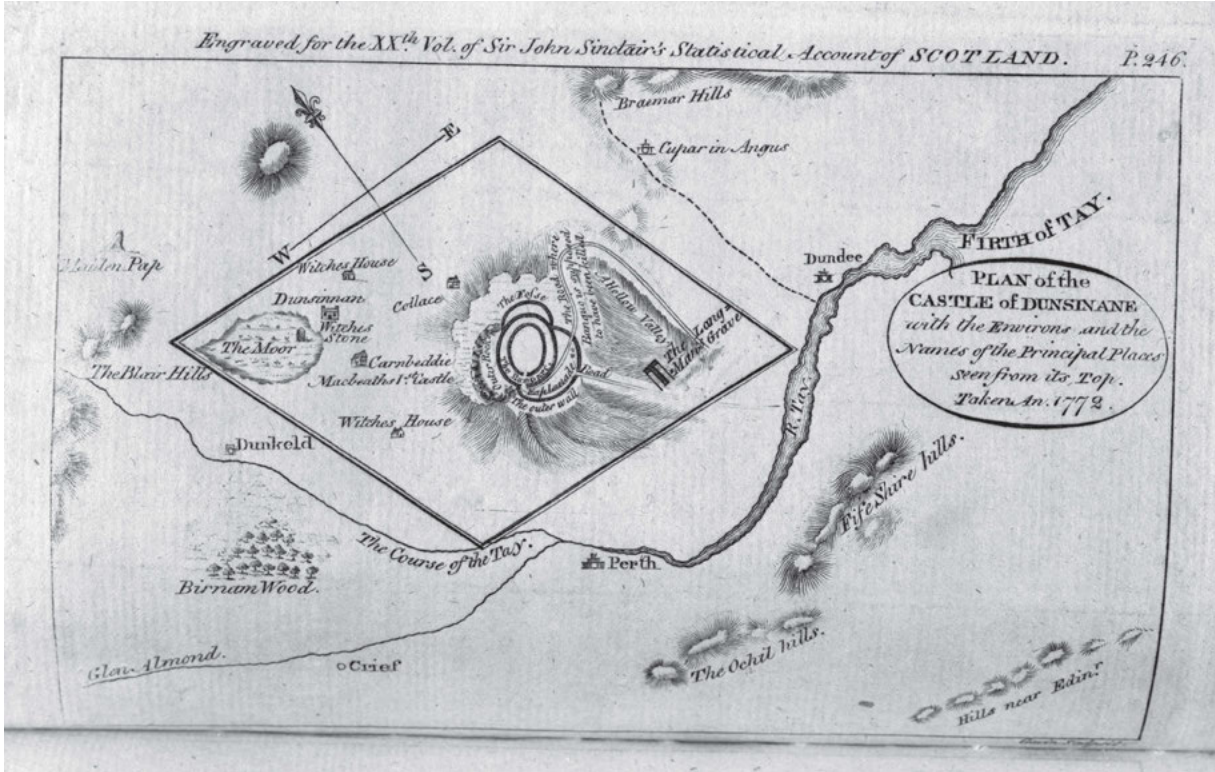
As he notes, Sinclair was not the first to make this speculation about Shakespeare's presence in Scotland. In his *General History of Scotland*, William Guthrie claims that "[t]he king, to prove how thoroughly he was now emancipated from the tutelage of his clergy, desired Elizabeth to send him this year a company of English comedians. She complied, and James gave them a license to act in his capital, and in his court. I have great reason to think that the immortal Shakespear was of the number" (Guthrie 1768, 358). Such ideas were not well received among later Scottish historians, who dismissed Guthrie's history as largely inaccurate. In a section entitled "Shakespeare never was in Scotland" in his *Topography of the Basin of Tay*, James Knox writes: "His great reason for supposing Shakespeare was among the number of the comedians who visited Scotland in 1599, [Guthrie] does not mention, and we have no doubt that it was merely a supposition. If his reason was good, he ought not to have withheld it from the reader, who is entitled to think for himself" (Knox 1831, 202).

In any case, it was Sinclair's memory of his visit to the site that served as the basis of a special section of his monumental multi-volume *Statistical Survey of Scotland*, amply entitled "Information Respecting the Castle of Dunsinnan, or Dunsinane, And on the probability, that Shakespeare, had collected on the Spot, the Traditions of the Country respecting Macbeth, and founded thereon his celebrated Drama," which features a corresponding map (Figure 2) that depicts, among other things, the witches' dwellings on either side of Macbeth's castle and a group of trees in what appears to be a military formation labeled "Birnam Wood."<sup>2</sup> Sinclair's map offers an early visual representation of what Nick Aitchison describes as "a rich and unique body of topographical mythology" that has grown up around the sites depicted in Shakespeare's version of a Scottish past (Aitchison 1999, 184).

Shakespeare's play similarly shaped the imagination of Welsh traveler and antiquarian Thomas Pennant, who traversed this thoroughly mythologized topography in his late-eighteenth-century tours of Scotland. In an account of his first journey in 1769, Pennant describes passing by Birnam Wood, "which seems never to have recovered the march its ancestors made to Dunsinane," and seeing "at a great distance a high ridge of hills, where some remains of that famous fortress \* (Macbeth's castle) are said yet to exist" (Pennant 1771, 74).<sup>3</sup> Pennant would go on to quote Shakespeare at length in his account of his subsequent 1772 journey, where he imagines hearing Macbeth's scout deliver the news that "[t]he wood began to move!" followed by Macbeth's final lines of defiance as he learns that Macduff was technically "of no woman born" (Pennant 1776, 179, 176).

By the time he made additions to his earlier account, Pennant had learned from Scottish historian David Dalrymple that Boece, the Scottish chronicler who served as a source for Holinshed's *Chronicles* and therefore

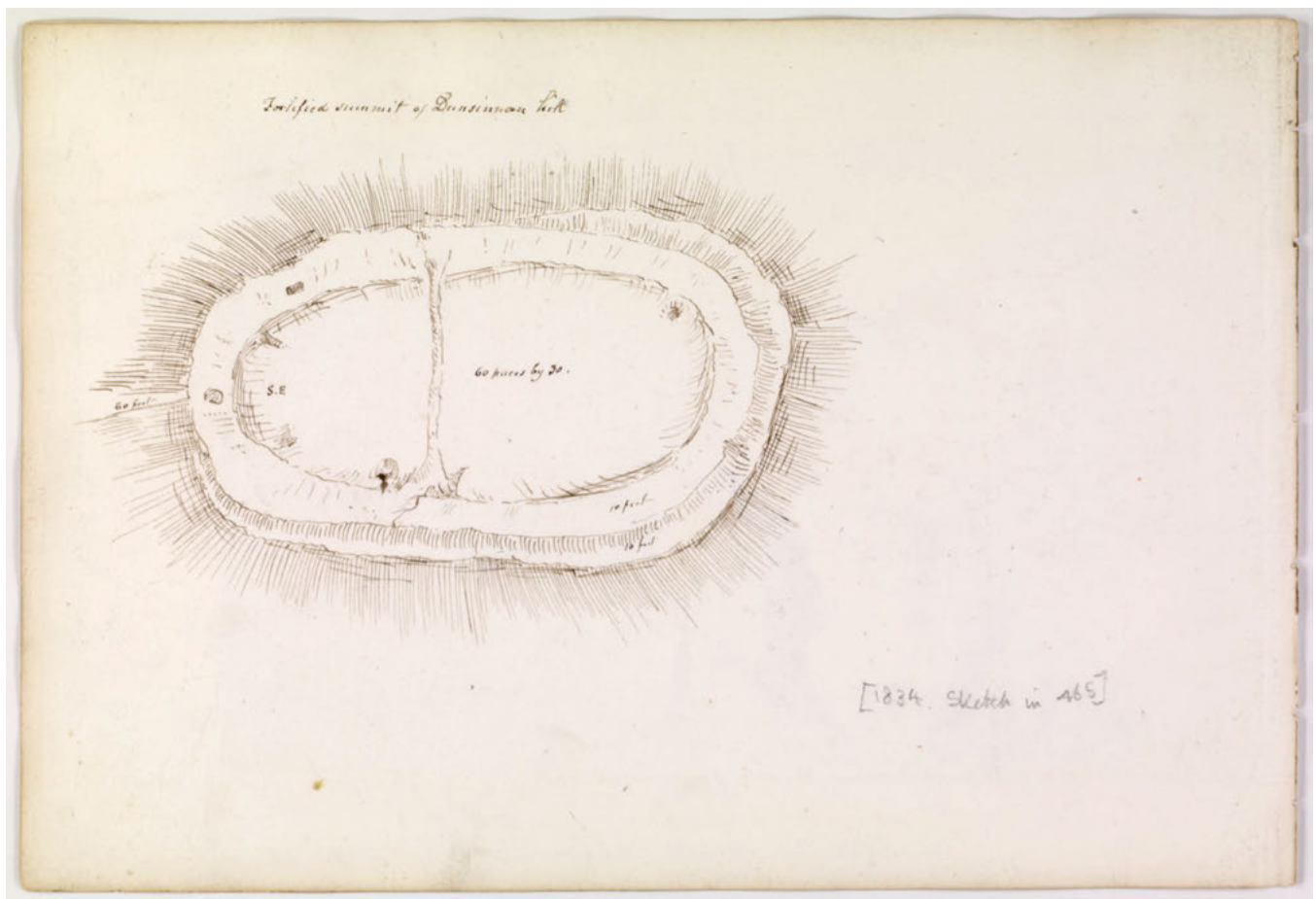




**Figure 2.** Plan of the Castle of Dunsinane with the Environs and the Names of the Principal Places seen from its Top. Taken An. 1772. From Sir John Sinclair, ‘Information Respecting the Castle of Dunsinnan, or Dunsinane, And on the probability, that Shakespeare, had collected on the Spot, the Traditions of the Country respecting Macbeth, and founded thereon his celebrated Drama.’

*Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland.*

Shakespeare’s play, was guilty of having “exerted all his inventive powers in delineating the character and history of McBeth” (Dalrymple 1776, 3).<sup>4</sup> Echoing Dalrymple’s comments about what “the genius of Shakespeare” did to give “such strength of colouring to the portrait” painted by Boece, however, Pennant’s addendum speaks to a seemingly fixed hierarchy between historical fact and the cultural stronghold that Shakespearean storytelling continues to have today (Dalrymple 1776, 3). “It gives me real concern,” he writes somewhat ironically of a play about usurpation, “to find any historical authority for overthrowing the beautiful relation that the powerful genius of *Shakespeare* has formed out of Boethius’s tale of *Macbeth*” (Pennant 1776, 12). For visitors like Pennant who found themselves attached to Shakespeare’s version of events, fiction would always outweigh, and continuously muddy, fact.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, even John Pinkerton, an antiquarian and compiler of travel narratives, reluctantly resigned himself to this reality when editing Pennant’s writing in the early nineteenth century: “The foundation of all this tale is overthrown lately by the learned and accurate author of the *Annals of Scotland*: but, out of respect to the numberless sublime passages it has furnished the poet with, I suffer to retain its place here” (Pinkerton 1809, 441).<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 3.** James Skene, 'Fortified summit of Dunsinnan hill,' from 'Drawings of the ancient sculptured monuments still standing in Scotland, as they presently appear, 1832,' 67r.

*Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland.*

References to Shakespeare's lasting imprint on this land also appear in the records of more invasive interactions with Dunsinane Hill in subsequent years. Sometime in the late 1790s, Scottish minister Dr. James Playfair performed an excavation of the site, the details of which were recorded by James Robertson in his 1799 *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Perth*. According to Robertson, Playfair "made" a "section" "across the hills" by "penetrat[ing] seven yards horizontally into the heart of the mass of stones and rubbish" and "making incisions into other parts of the rampart" (Robertson 1799, 569–70). Although they revealed the composition of the stone wall and uncovered a few animal skulls, these penetrative, surgical actions turned up very little in the way of material evidence related to the events described by what Playfair himself referred to as "the pen of the immortal Shakespeare" (Playfair 1819, 37). The "deep trench" left behind by Playfair's excavation was so permanent that it was registered in an 1834 drawing by visitor James Skene (Figure 3) and can still be seen today (Playfair 1819, 488). As David Christison explained at the turn of the twentieth century, the indelible marks left on the landscape by Playfair's and John M. Nairne's subsequent 1854 excavations are "the evil results of unskilled, incomplete and hasty excavations, undertaken too often with the object of proving preconceived

theories” (Christison 1900, 86). The role that Shakespeare and his pen have played in driving preconceptions of archeological evidence was perhaps best summed up by T.A. Wise in his 1859 description of the site and its recent excavations:

Dunsinane Hill has been rendered so famous by the genius of Shakespere, in the noblest of his dramas, that it is equally vain for the antiquarian and historian to allege that Macbeth was a popular and just prince, during whose reign there was peace and plenty, and that his castle, as well as his cairn, are in Aberdeenshire: the dramatic magician willed it, and Macbeth is considered a treacherous usurper of the crown, and a bloody tyrant. The reason of this difference being, that the dramatist did not confine himself to the accuracy of the historian. (Wise 1859, 93)

Even as he articulates the historical “facts,” Wise concedes that they would do little to correct the record. By the mid-nineteenth century, “the genius of Shakespeare” had become such a powerful cultural force that the historian could no longer—or perhaps never could—compete with the will of the “dramatic magician.” The damage had been done.

As I will show in the next section, David Greig’s *Dunsinane* emerges precisely from the ongoing tension between dramatic fiction and history that continues to shape cultural and touristic engagement with this Scottish site. With the same flexibility as the “dramatic magician,” Greig “does not confine himself to the accuracy of the historian” but rather, as he puts it, “takes the same fragment of Scottish history and tells a different chunk of it” (quoted in Jones 2015). In order to tell what he calls his “version of the story,” Greig uses and often inverts the tools and techniques by which Shakespeare’s plays stage the colonial imposition of English on women’s bodies and foreign landscapes alike (quoted in Lee 2014). The result is not only a re-appropriation of a site that has been distorted by Shakespeare and his eager pilgrims but also a play that dramatizes the political, ethical, and terrestrial stakes of re-entering what Desmet has described as an “arena within which the relation between Self and Other is worked out” (Desmet 1999, 8).<sup>7</sup> For Greig, the act of appropriation is not just about speaking back to Shakespeare but about doing so on land that was never his and in a language that he never understood in the first place.

### **“CAPTUR[ING] THE WORLD IN WORDS”: LANGUAGE, LANDSCAPE, AND CONQUEST**

Opposite the first page of the published version of *Dunsinane* is an explanatory note that tells us that “[Dialogue in square brackets is spoken in Gaelic.]” Clare Wallace has astutely compared the use of this device to Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980), a play written almost entirely in English even though the Irish characters are supposed to be speaking Irish Gaelic, among other languages (Wallace 2014, Loc. 551; Wallace 2016, 33). As the production’s original director

Roxana Silbert has explained, however, the lines that are printed in brackets were actually spoken in Gaelic in performances of *Dunsinane*, and the cast included native speakers of Gaelic (Silbert 2019). Given the fact that only 1.7 percent of the population in Scotland “has some Gaelic language skills” according to the 2011 census (“Gaelic” 2015),<sup>8</sup> the vast majority of the play’s Anglophone audiences both within and beyond Scotland would have had what Ariel Watson describes as “a necessarily fragmentary and alienated experience of the events they witness[ed]” (Watson 2014, 237). Before a single word is spoken, then, Greig’s play is prepared to resist the invading English forces who are covering themselves in twigs and leaves on stage as *Dunsinane* begins.

The play quickly shifts perspectives and languages in the next scene when audiences and readers meet Gruach — the historical Lady Macbeth — and her son Lulach as a Scottish soldier warns them in Gaelic of the approaching English army. After her son flees, Gruach refuses the soldier’s suggestion that she also hide with a simple but defiant Gaelic “[No.],” an utterance that establishes her voice as the play’s chief source of resistance (13). In her first exchange with Siward, the leader of the English invasion, she reveals that she is also able to resist in his language but this time with the linguistic and semantic opposite of her first response:

**SIWARD**

Woman, your castle has fallen.

...

Do you understand?

...

I am Siward.

I am England.

Do you speak English?

**GRUACH**

Yes. (27)<sup>9</sup>

Gruach’s deliberately delayed “Yes” reveals that while Siward believes that he is in control, it is she who manipulates the silence, the elliptical space opened up by linguistic and cultural encounter. As she uses her sexuality — a quality so powerfully associated with her character in Shakespeare’s portrayal — to seduce Siward in a later scene, Gruach cleverly plays with language and linguistic difference to remind him that *he* is still occupying *her* country. Siward finds her “captivating,” but she is quick to clarify that she is *his* “captive,” speaking *his* language: “You’re an elegant talker, Siward, I’ll give you that, but for me — / To seduce a man in English — it’s like dancing wearing wooden shoes” (69). When Siward complains during a post-coital conversation about the fact that Gruach’s women are “talking secretly” in his presence but quickly rejects her suggestion to learn their language because he claims it is “hard to learn,” Gruach explains that such complexity is precisely what sets it apart from the blunt tool of conquest that English has become:

**GRUACH**

Your English is a woodworker’s tool.



## Borrowers and Lenders

Siward.

Hello, goodbye, that tree is green, Simple matters.

A soldier's language sent out to capture the world in words. Always trying to describe.

Throw words at a tree and eventually you'll force me to see the tree just as you see it. We long since  
gave up believing in descriptions.

Our language is the forest. (76)

Connecting language to landscape, Gruach seems to anticipate the force with which the land on which she stands would become captured and reshaped by an English force perhaps more powerful than any other. The images of a tree and the forest are unmistakable echoes of the infamously mobile Birnam Wood, but as Watson writes, "[l]anguage is the Birnam Wood of Siward's downfall; the topography he cannot interpret, shifting and oblique. It is Gruach who can impress the forest, bid the tree unfix his earthbound root" (Watson 2014, 237). Even as it bends to her will, though, the linguistic forest that Gruach invokes is also decidedly fixed and rooted, entangled beneath the earth's surface in networks of deeply local meaning that refuse to make themselves known to the outsider who has been "sent out to capture the world in words" with his "simple," superficial descriptions.

Gruach responds to Siward's subsequent request to teach him her tongue by performing a language lesson that is reminiscent of the Anglo-French exchanges in Shakespeare's *Henry V* but with provocatively inverted gender dynamics. As she teaches him that "[no]" means "yes" and "[yes]" means "no," Gruach's language lesson is deliberately designed to play into Siward's fears about language and to expose the violence of his presence:

**SIWARD**

Teach me.

*Gruach speaks.*

**GRUACH**

[Maybe you already speak our language. Do you?]

**SIWARD**

What did you say?

**GRUACH**

I asked you if you understood what I was saying.

**SIWARD**

How do you say 'yes'?

**GRUACH**

[No.]

Borrowers and Lenders

SIWARD

[No.]

GRUACH

Yes.

SIWARD

Ask me again.

GRUACH

[Maybe you already speak our language. Do you?]

SIWARD

[No.]

*Gruach's women laugh.*

Your women are laughing at me. (76–77)

In this exchange, Gruach cleverly tricks Siward into echoing her first strong Gaelic word of resistance in such a way that reveals his weakness—both for her and in the face of the linguistic difference that she manipulates while her women laugh at his expense. When Siward attempts to defuse the situation by asking, “Which of us is really the conqueror here and which of us the conquered?,” Gruach bitinglly assures him: “Oh, you’re the conqueror” (77). In using indigenous language to invert the yes/no binary of consent, Gruach unsettles Siward’s attempt at colonial conquest while reminding him that his sustained English monolingual presence is itself an act of aggression.<sup>10</sup>

Siward looks equally foolish when he attempts to communicate with the women in Gruach’s service in a later scene:

SIWARD

Is the Queen here?

*The Women stop their work.*

I’m looking for the Queen.

*The Women don’t speak.*

Is she here?

*The Women don’t speak.*

## Borrowers and Lenders

I was told this was the Queen's lake.  
I was told this was her island.  
I was told this was her chapel.

*The Women don't speak.*

I was told you are her women?

*The Women don't speak.*

Why won't you answer?

*Gruach enters.*

### GRUACH

They don't speak English.

Nearly a year here and you haven't yet learned our language. (130)

The repetition of the stage direction "*The Women don't speak*," which seems both to echo and to invert the infamous "*The Lady speaks in Welsh*" pseudo-stage directions in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, presents yet another moment of tension between print and performance.<sup>11</sup> On the stage, audiences would see and hear the embodied silence as the women do not respond to Siward's insistent anaphoric repetition of the English phrase "I was told," but on the page, the italic words at once stand in for and name the problem of female silence in this linguistic encounter. The comment Gruach makes as she returns to the scene not only highlights Siward's hegemonic approach to restoring peace in Scotland but also reminds the audience that Siward's discomfort is theirs as well.

Throughout the play, Greig juxtaposes the fraught linguistic exchanges between Siward and Gruach with the activities of the young English soldiers, who frequently write home to their mothers about the harsh, wet, cold Scottish landscape while asserting their gendered sexual identity through the violent conflation of women's bodies with property and territory. The militarized hypermasculine pubescence of these young boys reaches its fullest expression in the presence of a recurring character known only as the "Hen Girl," a young woman on whose body the soldiers fixate. With an uncomfortably rhythmic crudeness, they repeat the word "tit" as they fantasize about touching her breast while aiming their arrows at the breast of a woman depicted on a tapestry they have just inventoried in the castle: "Dear God, please make it that if I hit that woman in the tit then . . . then make it that I'll touch a tit tonight" (71). Within the logic of this military invasion, property becomes erotic, and women's bodies become objects that are to be seized, inventoried, and violated.

When the Hen Girl appears again in a later scene, the English soldiers aim their sexualized arrows directly at her: "Hit her right between the legs. / Hit her lips. / Hit her tits. / Take off her dress and hit every inch of her naked body. / Princess" (115). Rather than actually firing their arrows, though, they encourage one of the

archers among them to talk to her despite their linguistic difference, claiming that “you don’t need to speak a girl’s language to talk to her . . . It’s all just sounds when you talk to girls” (116). What ensues is a dumb show of sorts that plays out in stage directions as the Hen Girl performs romantic interest only to pull a knife out of the folds of her dress, stab the English archer, free the Scottish prisoners, and yell in Gaelic, “[All of you — rise and fight — / Fight the invader. / Fight.]” (118). When she realizes that she cannot escape the English soldiers, she turns her knife on herself. Horrified by this event, the soldiers conclude that they “have got to get out of this fucking country” (119), but it is clear that members of the majority Anglophone audience who can only understand what the soldiers are saying are meant to hear their violent sexual commentary on her body as the truly disturbing thing in this scene. Once again, language becomes the dramatic means by which Greig highlights the conflation of sexual violence against native women with military occupation and colonial desecration of the land.

The play’s obsessive focus on the Hen Girl’s breast—as a target of military force, as an object of sexual desire, and as the site of her own self-inflicted death—also comes to stand in for Dunsinane Hill itself. Several early writers, including Sir John Sinclair, reached for Irish Gaelic etymology to suggest that the name Dunsinane meant “hill of ants,” perhaps as a reference to the swarm of men who climbed the hill to build Macbeth’s castle on top. Nineteenth-century commentators such as George Chalmers, however, noted how strange it was for etymologists to “fetch from afar what may be found at home,” explaining that “*Dun-sinin* signifies, in the Scoto-Irish, a hill, resembling a *nipple*; and, in fact, this famous hill does appear, at some distance, to resemble what the Scoto-Irish word describes, with the usual attention of Gaelic people to picturesque propriety, in their local names” (Chalmers 1807, 414).<sup>12</sup> As James Knox put it in his *Topography of the Basin of the Tay*, “[i]t is well known, that the ancient Celtæ, in giving appropriate appellations to hills and mountains, commonly marked the diversity of their appearances by names denoting their resemblance to different parts of the human form, or of the bodies of the inferior animals” (Knox 1831, 197). Indeed, we can see a trace of this practice on Sinclair’s map from his 1772 visit, which records the name of a nearby hill as “Maiden Pap.”<sup>13</sup> As descriptive and traditional as they may be, even these naming conventions reveal the gendered and hierarchical forms of power that shaped human interactions with this land, especially those that are framed in terms of military strategy and advantage. But if we look at the etymological gymnastics required to associate Dunsinane Hill with the labor that supported Macbeth’s military fortress rather than with the anatomy of a woman, we are reminded that places and their names can be—and have been—reshaped to fit the ideologies of the stories that are told about them.

Greig reflects on the consequences of this phenomenon in an extended speech delivered by Macduff when he responds to Siward’s exasperated remark that the people of Scotland are a mystery to him:

**MACDUFF**

There wasn’t always war here, Siward.

## Borrowers and Lenders

Once there were harvests and markets and courts and monasteries. When I was young you could look down a glen and know the names of everything in it. The names came from colours or the trees that stood there or whose house it was that lived there. Red hill, birch grove, Alistair's house. But when war comes it doesn't just destroy things like harvests and monasteries—it destroys the names of things as well. It shadows the landscape like a hawk and whatever name it sees it swoops down and claws it away. Red hill is made the hill of the slaughter. Birch grove is made the grove of sorrow and Alistair's house is made the place where Ally's house once was.

We don't know where we are anymore.

We are not mysterious people, Siward, we're just lost. (120)

Much like the places Macduff reminisces about, Dunsinane Hill was not always associated with Macbeth and certainly not with Shakespeare's violent version of his reign and the arboreal invasion that supposedly ended it. Rather, as Greig's Macduff explains, this place and its environs were once rooted in the natural world and profoundly connected to local people. Although no naming practices can ever be neutral, Greig takes this moment to speculate about a lost past, reminding his audience of the erasures that happen when cultural heritage becomes synonymous with military myth.

It is indeed telling that *Dunsinane* concludes not with martial success on either side but with the enduring symbol of maternity for which the hill seems to have been named. All appears to be lost when the English soldiers capture Gruach's son Lulach, force him to confess through a translator, and eventually cut off his head, but his final utterance—the Gaelic word for “[Mother.]” spoken quite literally in his mother tongue—suggests otherwise (123). When the mother for whom he calls confronts Siward, she points to his gendered error in believing to have fixed the problem of her family's claim to the throne: “You killed the boys in Glen Lyon. / But you let the women go. / That was a mistake” (133–134). It was a mistake, she claims, because Lulach apparently had a son, who now has a claim to the throne. When Siward threatens to kill that baby in a final desperate act, Gruach hauntingly says, “Kill the child, Siward. Scotland will find another child.” (135). In this moment, the powerful force of maternity and reproduction resist an easy military solution. Gruach exposes the supposedly “good intentions” of the male English forces, intentions to which Siward clings, as she puts it, “like dead babies at [his] breast” (135). The play's final word belongs to Gruach, and it is as simple and forceful as her first, but this time, it is in a language her English-speaking audiences both on and offstage will understand: “Go.”

## GREIG ON DUNSINANE

In June 2016, amid a year of global events organized around the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death, Marianne Taylor of *The Herald* “brought Greig up Dunsinane to talk about the influence of Shakespeare on the Scottish imagination and vice versa” (Taylor 2016). During their walk to the top of the infamous hill, Greig recounted the experience of hearing of Scottish place names in Dominic Hill's production of *Macbeth*



at Dundee Repertory Theatre in 2004: “I had previously driven past Birnam and Dunsinane, and suddenly I found myself reconnecting with these places.” This moment of geographical reconnection on Greig’s part coincided with what he identified as a trend in several recent Scottish productions of the play that seemed to bring out the resonances between the toppling of the tyrant that Shakespeare portrays and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. “Everyone was talking about toppling tyrants,” Greig explained, “[b]ut it struck me that we needed a play about what happens after you topple a tyrant.” As several scholars have detailed in their writing on *Dunsinane*, what began as a political allegory about British and American military presence in the Middle East took on another layer of sociopolitical meaning as Scotland contemplated the future of its place in Great Britain, a union whose earliest iteration served as the original occasion for the composition of *Macbeth* when James I ascended the English throne in 1603.<sup>14</sup>

Greig fully embraces the influence and inspiration of Shakespeare on his playwriting career since it began nearly thirty years ago, but it is also apparent that this reverence produces an uncomfortable tension when it comes to Scotland and its places. He has indicated in several interviews that one of his goals in writing *Dunsinane* was to rehabilitate the legacy of Macbeth, who may not have been the tyrant Shakespeare made him out to be, but his choice to write a play that bears the title of a site that has been traversed and disturbed often in the name of Shakespeare suggests that his interest in redeeming a ruler with a nasty reputation is secondary to a much more profound sense of the deeply gendered relationship between language and landscape.<sup>15</sup> By crafting his play around the figure of Gruach, whom he describes as *Macbeth*’s “best character,” and making her the voice of Gaelic resistance to English invasion, Greig offers an alternative to a history warped by Shakespeare’s legacy that allows the silenced women and the land with which they have been conflated an opportunity to speak back and say “[No.]”

## NOTES

1. I wish to thank my students and colleagues at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, who graciously agreed to take a detour to Dunsinane Hill with me during our 2017 summer semester in Scotland. My early thinking about this topic was shaped by the “read-and-tweet” conversations about Shakespeare and cultural appropriation organized by Vanessa Corredera and Geoffrey Way. I am enormously grateful to Ruben Espinosa, Katherine Gillen, and Debapriya Sarkar for their feedback on earlier versions. And finally, I give my sincere thanks to Louise Geddes for coordinating the 2019 SAA Articles-in-Progress Practicum and to Sujata Iyengar for sharing her expertise and offering invaluable suggestions for revision.
2. Sinclair 1798, 246. The section on Dunsinnan and the map also appear to have been published as a separate pamphlet, a copy of which is currently held in the Folger Shakespeare Library. The bibliography of Pennant’s *Tours in Scotland* is complex. For an overview and clarification, see Constantine and Leask 2017, 245–248.

3. On the possibility that Shakespeare also drew from George Buchanan's 1582 *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, see Hillier 2019.
4. Mineral engineer John Williams describes being on top of "the hill of Dunsinan" and surveying its surroundings as well: "The beauty and excellency of this noble situation, our great Shakespeare sufficiently points out in his tragedy of Macbeth, by setting the tyrant to work, in time of danger, to fortify himself in a place he judged from its situation impregnable; by placing his people continually on the look-out, and at last discovering Malcolm's army carrying green boughs, which they took to be 'the wood of Birnham moving towards Dunsinan,' to the great astonishment of the tyrant" (Williams 1777, 53).
5. The *Annals of Scotland* mentioned here are those of David Dalrymple.
6. Following Mary Louise Pratt, Maria Elena Capitani has described this arena as a "contact zone." Greig's Scotland, she argues, is a liminal and liquid space where antagonistic forces clash. See Capitani 2016, 23.
7. "On Census Day, 27 March 2011, a total of 87,100 people aged 3 and over in Scotland (1.7 per cent of the population) had some Gaelic language skills. This included 57,600 people who could speak Gaelic" ("Gaelic" 2015).
8. Block quotations from *Dunsinane* are formatted here to reproduce as closely as possible the printed source within the limitations of the production platform.
9. On the complexity of binaries in Greig's work, including his *Yes/No* plays first developed on Twitter, see Pattie 2016.
10. A rich body of textual and performance scholarship has grown up around the missing Welsh lines of *I Henry IV*. See, for example, Schwyzer 2014; Lloyd 2007, 159–71; and Penlington 2010.
11. The Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust sign renders the etymology especially clear: "*Dun* (doon) is Gaelic for fort, and *sinnan* may derive from an earlier spelling of a personal name, or from the Gaelic *sine* meaning teat or nipple, referring to the shape of the hill."
12. See Figure 2 above.
13. For a reading of *Dunsinane* in light of historical and contemporary Anglo-Scottish politics, see #enlen Güvenç, 2014. Neil Rhodes has argued in his work on the Anglo-Scottish union that "it has never been possible to characterize Scotland as a maiden ravished by an invading colonial power" (Rhodes 2004, 38). Greig's speculative sequel to "the Scottish play" challenges such neat historical narratives and shines a bright light on the violent misogynistic rhetoric that Shakespeare and Shakespearians have long employed in order to tell them.
14. Greig states this goal explicitly in his conversation with Taylor: "Conceivably, my play is an attempt to restore his reputation" (Taylor 2016).

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