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DAVID HARE'S "STUFF HAPPENS": AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF IRAQ WAR*

David Hare'in "Stuff Happens"ı: Alternatif Bir Irak Savaşı Anlatısı

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ABSTRACT

In the 20th century postmodernism has fundamentally altered the approach to the concept of history. Showing that grand narratives can be reversed by minor narratives, Jean-François Lyotard played a great role in the development of postmodernism. The purpose of this article is to analyse how the dramatic techniques used in David Hare's play *Stuff Happens* in line with Lyotard's take deconstruct grand narratives about Iraq War at the beginning of the 21st century. By manipulating verbatim theatre techniques, the play asserts that historical reality must always be perceived through a sceptical perspective. Setting the political verbatim accounts, therefore the grand narratives, with unheard minor voices/narratives, Hare, both unearths the discrepancies of political reality and stresses that every narrative is fictional. In this respect, as a postmodern text, *Stuff Happens* rejects construction of grand narratives by drawing attention to alternative realities and demonstrates that political grand narratives cannot be unique realities.

Keywords: Stuff Happens, David Hare, Jean-François Lyotard, Postmodern History, Iraq War.

ÖZET

Postmodernizm 20. yüzyılda hiç şüphesiz tarih kavramına bakışı kökten bir şekilde değiştirmiştir. Bu değişimde resmi tarih gibi üst-anlatıların (grand narratives) alt-anlatılarla (minor narratives) ters yüz edilebileceğini gösteren Jean-François Lyotard'ın payı da oldukça büyüktür. Bu makalenin amacı David Hare tarafından yazılan *Stuff Happens* adlı oyununda kullanılan teatral tekniklerin Lyotard'ın izlerini takip ederek 21. yüzyılın başındaki Irak Savaşı hakkındaki üst-anlatıları nasıl değersiz kıldığını incelemektir. Oyun tarihi gerçekliğe olan bakışın daima şüpheci bir yaklaşım ile olması gerektiğini verbatim tiyatro tekniğini manipüle ederek anlatır.

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Hare, Irak Savaşı hakkında politikacılar tarafından verilen demeçleri ve dolayısıyla oluşturulan üst anlatıları daha az duyulan alt-anlatılar ve alternatif gerçekliklerle aynı sahnede buluşturarak hem politik gerçekliğin tutarsızlıklarını gün yüzüne çıkarır hem de her anlatının aslında bir kurgu olduğunu vurgular. Bu açıdan postmodern bir metin olan *Stuff Happens* susturulan alternatif gerçeklere dikkat çekerek üst-anlatıların oluşturulmasına karşı çıkar ve politik üst-anlatıların asla tek gerçek olamayacağını bir kez daha gösterir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Stuff Happens, David Hare, Jean-François Lyotard, Postmodern Tarih, Irak Savaşı.

Introduction

The traditional approach to history asserts that history consists of a single universal reality and that it is the task of the historian to bring that unique reality to the fore by means of evidence. Beyond any doubt, such an approach gives history the power to explain any truth and to hold the knowledge of anything that has happened since the beginning of the world. Postmodern theory, opposed to any kind of metanarrative, strips history of its supposed possession of truth and knowledge, and puts the emphasis on a multiplicity of histories that originate from minor narratives. In his famous book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard describes the modern metanarratives of emancipation and totalisation, and lays bare the disparity between contemporary conditions and the modern metanarratives. For Lyotard, knowledge in contemporary society is no longer legitimated by these metanarratives but by performativity. Therefore, knowledge becomes a consequence of constant production for sale, and its performance, the value ratio, determines its legitimacy. Lyotard does not approve of any of these methods for legitimating knowledge. He stresses that contemporary society is comprised of multiple minor narratives with peculiar language games, and rather than a consensus on knowledge, it produces paralogies through these games. In this respect, this study draws upon the theory of knowledge developed by Lyotard to elucidate the postmodern characteristics of David Hare's *Stuff Happens*. In this analysis, Lyotard's theory will be effective in relating a postmodern meaning to the techniques Hare uses in his play.

In *Stuff Happens*, Hare is concerned with the historical events that mostly take place after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. The play contains many verbatim accounts taken from political statements made by the prominent political agents of the period. Neverthe-

less, the playwright experiments with the definition of verbatim drama, and he integrates his imagination into the construction of the play. In the play, Bush and his cabinet members, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice, together with the British PM Tony Blair, lead their countries into a military intervention in Iraq. Only Colin Powell, for a long while, opposes war, but eventually he also gives in to the pressure. Having regard to the theoretical arguments Lyotard develops about postmodern narratives, this article scrutinises the technical and thematic elements in *Stuff Happens*. At the beginning, a historical background of the 9/11 attacks is given. Then, the verbatim characteristic of the play and Hare's experimentation with this technique will be touched upon. Following that, the two types of modern metanarratives that Bush and the others exploit to propagandise the war will be delineated. The descriptive and prescriptive statements used in the construction of the metanarratives will be highlighted. Finally, the verbatim and epic techniques will be brought to light to show that, in Lyotardian fashion, this play rejects universal metanarrative (primarily history) but rather draws attention to local/minor narratives.

Stuff Happens explores the blueprints of a now notorious invasion planned and executed by George W. Bush, the 11th President of the US, and his cabinet following the horrific terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) on 11 September 2001. On that day, nineteen members of a terrorist organisation, Al Qaeda, perpetrated an unprecedented kind of violence by hijacking four commercial planes and crashing into the WTC, the Pentagon, and the White House to accomplish their "jihadist" aims. Although they did not hit all of their targets, the terrorists were able to crash two planes into the Twin Towers of the WTC. As a result, nearly three thousand people were killed while around a further seven thousand were injured in these attacks. On top of these casualties, millions of people watched the moment of collision and the collapse of the Twin Towers live. Subsequently, similar attacks targeted Madrid and London respectively in 2004 and 2005 to create a huge fear of terrorism which can injure or kill people when they are seemingly safe behind closed doors or on the way home. By all means, people are not only afraid of but also furious with the master mind of these attacks; many believe that someone should be punished. "After that September day in 2001," Tom Lansford states, "Americans became increasingly willing to exchange civil liberties and individual freedoms for promises of greater personal security and protection from future attacks" (2011: xi). Eventually, these attacks

turned out to be a cornerstone of the ensuing political action and bring about two consecutive wars in Afghanistan (2001-...) and Iraq (2003-2011). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the American government takes firm action, and just three days later, the US Senate, by a majority of 420 to 1, approves a new bill authorising the President to use

> "all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons." (Document-1).

The primary target of the US army is Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden, the leader of the terrorist organisation Al-Qaeda, has been living. According to the US intelligence, Al-Qaeda is the terrorist organisation responsible for the 9/11 attacks, as a consequence of which a military operation called "Operation Enduring Freedom" begins on 7 October 2001 with airstrikes to neutralise Al-Qaeda targets. However, the war lasts longer than expected. Bin Laden is killed after some ten years on 2 May 2011 in Pakistan. The Afghan War becomes the longest military campaign in American history, and only as late as the end of 2014 can the US and the NATO-led forces officially end their military engagement (Tucker, 2016: 20-21).

The next target of the Bush government, after weakening Al-Qaeda, is Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, which is an alleged supporter of Al-Qaeda and is believed to possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD) with the capability of threatening the world with similar atrocities to 9/11. On 11 October 2002, the US Congress this time authorises the President to use force against Iraq, and, without any opposition from the United Nations Security Council, publishes Resolution 1441 giving Iraq a last chance to abide by the rules and warning Iraq of the likely consequences should they fail to comply (Mcgoldrick, 2004: 54). A further resolution declaring that Iraq had in fact failed to comply is rejected by the UN members France, Russia, and Germany, but does not stop the coalition of the US, the UK, and Spain from beginning "Operation Iraqi Freedom," as it is called by the US, on 20 March 2003. After a short while, the President declares victory on an aircraft carrier under the flag of "mission accomplished"; he announces that "Operation Iraqi Freedom was carried out with a combination of precision and speed and boldness the enemy did not expect and the world had not seen before" (URL-1). Yet the with-

drawal operation of the US forces lasts until the early 2010s, and the emergent political void is manipulated by nascent terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

In the meantime, one of the most controversial issues has been the investigation of weapons of mass destruction because they were the pivotal reason for the war. Christopher Gelpi et al. stress that

> "[p]rior to the outbreak of the war, the belief that Saddam Hussein had WMD was almost a consensus position. Even the leaders of governments that opposed America's decision to use force did not dispute the claim that Saddam was not complying with U.N. WMD inspections and possibly was concealing a WMD capability." (2009: 225).

However, no satisfactory reports proving the existence of the weapons had been supplied by the UN inspectors, and none were discovered even after US forces gain control of Iraq. Therefore, it has been highly speculated over time that those weapons were used merely as a pretext for war. Some journalists like Sidney Blumenthal claim that Bush already knew Iraq did not possess the alleged WMDs, but "the information was distorted in a report written to fit the preconception that Saddam [has] WMD programs" (URL-2). Moreover, Kathleen Hall Jamieson has analysed the plethora of ambiguous statements made by American politicians and argues that "while those making the case for intervention in Iraq may have 'believed' that Saddam was hiding stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, their rhetoric reveals that they lacked the evidence required to justify any of their categorical assertions that Saddam had WMD" (2007: 250). However, it took a while for the public to recognise the gaps in the rhetoric of war and grow sceptical of the political discourse. As a result of this latency, hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers lost their lives and paid the cost of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Stuff Happens

Hare has been one of the playwrights to utilise his art to fuel the incredulity of the public. *Stuff Happens* presents the process after the 9/11 attacks leading up to the Iraq War from the perspective of the prominent political figures George W. Bush, the members of his cabinet, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, the then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and several representatives of the UN. The main narrative is grounded on the contrasting views of George Bush and the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. The conflict between these two politi-

cians emerges from Powell's resistance to any military action against Iraq government before all other means have been tried. Nevertheless, Powell cannot stand alone against the increasing political pressure, and in the play, as in real life, he succumbs to the pro-war arguments. According to Elizabeth Kuti, Powell is a tragic hero, and his *hamartia* – his lack of resistance against the persistence of pro-war claims – brings the plague to "Thebes"; that is, it brings about global turmoil and the death of hundreds of thousands of people (2008: 465-68). Indeed, Powell is a veteran of the Vietnam War, and knowing the bitter reality of war, he is the most experienced of the cabinet. At the beginning of the play he lays bare his beliefs about war and says, "War should be the politics of last resort" (Hare, 2006: 3). Nevertheless, he yields to his colleagues, who have dealt merely with the theory and epistemology of war.

The title of the play refers to the now notorious statement made by the then-Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld at a press conference given after the "liberation" of Baghdad by the coalition forces, when asked about the civil chaos pervading the "liberated" cities due to the lack of local security forces who abandoned their posts in fear of the invasion. Rumsfeld believes that it is the price of freedom to confront probable misdeeds because freedom gives people the right to sin:

> "I could do that in any city in America. Think what's happened in our cities when we've had riots, and problems and looting. Stuff Happens! But in terms of what is going on in that country, it is a fundamental misunderstanding to see those images over, and over, and over again of some boy walking out with a vase and say, 'Oh, my goodness, you didn't have a plan.' That's nonsense. They know what they're doing, and they are doing a terrific job. And it's untidy, and freedom is untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things, and that's what's going to happen here." (URL-3).

This euphemistic explanation of the bitter results of the invasion conveys the metaphorical distance between the US government and the harsh realities of Iraq and/or the Middle East. Hare turns this distance into irony by giving the title "Stuff Happens" to his anti-war play. Timothy James Hamilton comments that "Hare primes his audience for a play about an administration with no true regard for human life, where thousands of deaths are explained away with one damning phrase: Stuff. Happens" (2007: 13). With regard to this, the title of the play satirises the downplaying of the destruction of people's lives by the US government.

However, it is also significant that the play is not just sheer propaganda against the decisions taken by the Bush government. Although a product of the legacy of docudrama, *Stuff Happens* never turns to an agit-prop, and does not merely promote the rejection of war but attempts to force its readers/audience, conservative or liberal, to review their thoughts on current war politics. In this respect, John Lahr stresses that "[b]y making ambivalence manifest, 'Stuff Happens' shows an admirable maturity. Hare is looking for complexity, not self-congratulation, and an inquiry that is history, not agitprop" (para. 7). Accordingly, the play does not simply put the blame on a small group of politicians, though mostly their dialogue is aired. It questions the liability of the ordinary people of both Iraq and the US.

In a similar manner, the characterisation of Hare in *Stuff Happens* eschews simplicity. The play's criticism of pro-war arguments does not necessarily turn the criticised politicians into grotesque or parodic figures. Although some critics like Anneka Esch-van Kan and Stephen Bottoms find Hare's representation of Bush, his cabinet, and Blair cartoonish in using their nicknames like "Wolfie", "Condi", and "Rummy", and for combining factual documents with fictional elements without any indication of their point of separation (Esch-van Kan, 2011: 419; Bottoms, 2006: 60), such an argument can easily be contradicted. Other critics like Janette Reinelt and Richard Hornby praise the serious depiction of Bush as "coldly sure of himself, able to handle power well in spite of his alleged mental shortcomings," "with a sense of entitlement" (Reinelt, 2005: 305-06), and as "nothing [. . .] hilarious" but "shrewd, distant, and totally lacking in self doubt" (Hornby, 2008: 648). Michael Billington, supporting Reinelt and Hornby's arguments, separates Hare's depiction of Bush from other oversimplifying comments and argues that "Bush, in many British eyes, is seen as some kind of holy fool or worse. But, through Hare's writing . . . he emerges as a wily and skilful manipulator who plays the role of a bumbling pseudo-Texan but constantly achieves his desired ends" (para. 7). Indeed, the argument of Kan and Bottoms lacks sufficient proof to call Hare's presentation a caricature, and their claims are discredited by Reinelt and Hornby. By and large, *Stuff Happens* maintains an ironic and satirical approach to Bush's politics. Needless to say, Hare is inclined towards liberalism and is critical of Bush's government due to its reckless treatment of such a serious problem as war. Nevertheless, the play does not become a cartoonish caricature or farce, with a critical approach to its subject because, as Toby Young explains, "[Hare has] taken the trouble to

master the arguments of his opponents" (URL-4). He does not display only one side of the argument.

The nameless characters that is the Journalist, British Politician, the Brit in New York, the Palestinian Academic, and the Iraqi Exile, also help *Stuff Happens* to have a balanced structure of pro-war and anti-war arguments. These characters break out in the political atmosphere of the White House and the other meeting places to express different responses to the Iraq War and American politics. Alongside anti-war responses, the pro-war argument is also given a voice. For instance, the Journalist defends the war waged against the dictator, Saddam Hussein, in a comparatively long and serious monologue and claims that the means of achieving freedom should not be the main concern:

> "JOURNALIST. Saddam Hussein attacked every one of his neighbours except Jordan. Imagine, if you will, if you are able, a dictator in Europe, murdering his own people, attacking his neighbours, killing half a million people for no other offence but proximity. [. . .] Would we ask, faced with the bodies, faced with the gas, faced with the ditches and the murders, would we really stop to say, 'Can we do this?'
> [. . .]
> A people hitherto suffering now suffer less. This is the story. No other story obtains." (Hare, 2006: 15).

The playwright does not comment on these characters' statements which he apparently conveys in a serious tone without any hint of insinuation or subtext. He just sets forth opposing views so as to demonstrate how the politics of the government assaulted the people involved from both sides.

While dramatising the politicians and the other "external" characters in *Stuff Happens*, the writer employs a mixture of documentary and verbatim drama as well as epic theatre. In the author's note, Hare explains his technique, his concurrent use of factual and fictional elements blurring the distinctions between different techniques; since the publication of the play, this technique seems to have become a controversial issue and drawn a considerable amount of attention from critical circles:

> "*Stuff Happens* is a history play, which happens to centre on very recent history. The events within it have been authenticated from multiple sources, both from private and public. What happened happened. Nothing in the narrative is knowingly untrue. Scenes of direct address quote people verbatim. When the doors close on the

world's leaders and on their entourages, then I have used my imagination. This is surely a play, not a documentary, and driven I hope, by its themes as much as by its characters and story." (Hare, 2006, "Author's Note").

From his statement, it can be understood that Hare conducts research to find out the "reality" behind the process leading up to the war, and he obtains some private information from behind the projected façade of the mainstream media. Meanwhile, he also embraces the role of a journalist. Believing that verbatim drama "does what journalism fails to do" (Hare as cited in Hammond and Steward, 2008: 62), at the heart of his play Hare plants the famous media images such as Bush's speech of victory on a battleship and the joint press conferences of Bush and Blair. Nevertheless, he is not satisfied solely with journalism and facts, and he does what journalism, in Karolina Golimowska's words, "by definition cannot do, namely to imaginatively step into the characters' worlds and thoughts without giving up the claim to veracity" (2012: 4). Together with the publicly known images, he creates a coherent narrative resorting to his imagination when there is no source of information. However, Hare does not disclose his private sources, nor does he distinguish for the reader when he uses a private source or his own imagination during the play. Therefore, although the reader/audience can identify the publicly known moments, it is not evident if the next scene or words are based on facts or fiction.

Peter Weiss, one of the earliest advocates of documentary drama in the 1960s, defines documentary drama in his article "Fourteen Principles for a Documentary Drama" (1971) as "a theatre of factual reports," and he gives a list of what those document may be: "Minutes of proceeding, files, letters, [. . .] official commentaries, speeches, interviews, statements by well-known personalities, press-[*sic*] radio-, photo- or film-reporting of events and all the other media bearing witness to the present form the bases of the production" (as cited in Dawson, 1999: 172). On the other hand, verbatim theatre, a term sometimes used interchangeably with documentary theatre and theatre of testimony, is considered to be a form of documentary drama that "employs (largely or exclusively) tape-recorded material from the 'real-life' originals of the characters and events to which it gives dramatic shape" (Paget, 1987: 317). Similar to documentary drama or docudrama, verbatim theatre "consistently aims to represent reality as a transparent structure which finds its way onto the stage almost without any deflection. Therefore, while the new journalism

used to be described as 'art of fact,' verbatim drama should rather be seen as 'fact with no art,' meaning no artificiality or artefact" (Lachman, 2007: 317). While they both make use of the aforementioned documents and records to uncover the reality on stage, verbatim theatre is more extreme, and it strictly adheres to the exact words uttered in real life. Derek Paget defines verbatim theatre as

> "predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place." (1987: 317).

Therefore, plays written using the verbatim technique aim to represent a slice of reality as it is, but this brings one back to the pivotal question posed in this study: Is it really possible to represent reality without the intervention of the fictional? In answer to this question Carol Martin makes the following comment, posing further questions:

> "Even as documentary theatre typically tries to divide fabrication from truth by presenting enactments of actual people and events from verifiable sources it is also where the real and the simulated collide and where they depend on each other. Much of today's dramaturgy of the real uses the frame of the stage not as a separation, but as a communion of the real and simulated; not as a distancing of fiction from nonfiction, but as a melding of the two. [. . .] In all this, we are left with important questions. Can we definitively determine where reality leaves off and representation begins? Or are reality and representation so inextricable that they have become indiscernible?" (2010: 2).

So, should Hare be trusted, as the writer of an alleged history play in the form of docudrama based on the verbatim accounts of political figures when he says, "[w]hat happened [in *Stuff Happens*] happened"? Is this really what Hare means in claiming such veracity? Can the reader/audience, as the ultimate consumers of the text, believe Hare's allegations of authenticity? When the structure of the play is examined, it is apparent that the playwright experiments with the formal traditions of verbatim theatre and plays with the perception of reality in the reader/audience's mind. In other words, he pays homage to the customs of formal insubordination according to Fraser by redefining the rules of ver-

batim theatre and deconstructing a traditional historical narrative on Iraq War.

To better understand the above assertion made by the playwright, it is paramount to understand contemporary playwrights' experimentation with the docudrama technique. The book *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present* (2009) edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson addresses the changes in documentary drama from the past to the present. In the introduction of the book Forysth and Megson emphasise that "documentary performance today is often as much concerned with emphasising its own discursive limitations, with interrogating the reification of material evidence in performance, as it is with the real-life story or event it is exploring" (2009: 3). Recognising these limitations in presenting an objective representation of the "real," Hare makes a speculative claim of veracity to underline the limitations of this genre.

Indeed, it would be naive to argue that Hare sincerely believes in the veracity of his presentation. "To the contrary," Esch-van Kan mentions, "it can be well argued that *Stuff Happens* accepts the inaccessibility of the events themselves and is enmeshed in the web of stories that make those events intelligible" (2011: 419). As such, *Stuff Happens* is actually a self-conscious text. As soon as the play begins, an actor directly addresses the reader/audience, advising of the complication of the real and the fictional in the oncoming text: "The inevitable is what will seem to happen to you purely by chance. The Real is what strikes you as really absurd. Unless you are certain you are dreaming, it is certainly a dream of your own. Unless you exclaim – 'There must be some mistake' – you must be mistaken" (Hare, 2006: 3). Here, one is asked to keep a sceptical eye on the things one considers to be the "real," "the inevitable," and without a mistake, not forgetting that even this text may be mistaken. Thus, Hare closes his remarks on the play by saying, "then I used my imagination. This is surely a play, not a documentary" (Hare, 2006, "Author's Note"). In other words, it is a narrative, and it narrates a version of reality instead of representing the "reality" itself, which is arguably beyond any narration.

Further criticism on *Stuff Happens* is centred on the popularity of the people Hare chooses as the characters of his alleged verbatim play. According to Michael Anderson and Linden Wilkenson's definition, "verbatim provides a platform for diverse, authentic voices, unheard in popular media" (2007: 154). Nevertheless, Hare's play is predicated upon the voices of the most well-known political figures receiving widespread media coverage. In line with Tricia Hopton's claim, it can be assumed that *Stuff*

Happens does not provide capacity for the minor voices of society (2011: 21). Hopton's argument can be confirmed to some extent since it is the national leaders like Bush and Blair, who certainly have the biggest media coverage in their countries and internationally, that speak most of the time in *Stuff Happens*. Yet what characterises the play is actually the scenes in which Hare either deconstructs the famous images of the politicians or moves away from the ordinary community of politicians. In an interview given to Georg Gaston, Hare declares that as a writer he has a life and as a human being, another life, drawing attention to the two different lives some people live: "Obviously spies have second lives, homosexuals do, various groups of people, you discover, have second lives, perhaps at night, which bear no relation to their first" (2009: 220).

Politicians can be placed at the top of the list of those with double lives. The lives they live before the cameras, in public, and the lives they live behind the "curtain," in private, may bear no relation to each other. Traditionally, historical accounts are preoccupied with the formal, documented, recorded side of their lives, and they refrain from commenting upon the private, undocumented, unrecorded side of these "great personalities." *Stuff Happens*, in providing the private side of the politicians unrecorded by the cameras, actually presents the unheard, minor voices in public. Thus, it gives its reader/audience a chance to compare the seen and the unseen side of contemporary media coverage.

At these moments, the reader/audience can see that politicians are not the great heroes they are sometimes considered to be, but they have mundane personalities like other people. They have worries, fears; they get happy, laugh at each other's remarks; they also fall into despair as ordinary people do. In one of those instances, for example, Blair makes hopeless expressions and looks desperate: "I am not asking Saddam to be clever. I'm just asking him to have some elementary cunning. Some vestigial instinct for survival. At least have that! Every politician has that! (*He looks away, lost.*) What am I meant to do?" (Hare, 2006: 89). Golimowska remarks that such a representation "shows the fragility, unpredictability and contingency of a history made by individuals whose intellectual shape is influenced by various trivial factors" (2012: 5). Put differently, history does not consist of the epic actions and decisions of heroes but of the mundane feelings of common people.

Jean François-Lyotard is one of the prominent postmodern theoreticians who rejects and deconstructs the epic narratives of these supreme heroes that have dominated history for centuries. In modern meta-

narratives, the leaders of nations may present themselves as heroic figures representing the authority of the people, but postmodern literature, including *Stuff Happens*, is vigilant and sceptical about grand narratives. In the simplest terms, Lyotard defines postmodernity as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984: xxiv), and *Stuff Happens*, in this regard, is incredulous towards metanarratives. It is the struggle between the desire to form an epic metanarrative in a *modern* style, as defined by Lyotard, and the deconstruction of it that constitutes the central issue in *Stuff Happens*. On the one hand, the play demonstrates the efforts made by Bush's government to construct a metanarrative of emancipation and totalisation, while on the other hand, it undermines the same metanarrative with a postmodern approach. As it concerns a historical milestone, *Stuff Happens* makes it clear that historical knowledge about such a turning point is shaped and legitimised by the metanarratives Lyotard mentions in *The Postmodern Condition*. Meanwhile, the two types of knowledge – scientific and narrative – forming the basis of metanarratives serve the interests of political truths and produce "beneficial" utterances. However, *Stuff Happens* does not only present the formation of metanarratives. It is also encumbered with the task of delegitimising metanarratives. By creating realities that go beyond reason and generate "paralogies," in Lyotard's terms, it protests the illusion of metanarratives and tarnishes the sparkling image of the modern grand hero. As a work of postmodernity, the play does not yield to totalising narratives but rather discerns tangible realities that are marginalised by grand narratives.

To begin with, *Stuff Happens* is a play about knowledge and history. It shows how history, as a form of knowledge, is based on narrative and how narrative legitimises scientific knowledge, particularly historical knowledge. Besides this, the play presents the inevitable relationship between knowledge and power. It concurs with Lyotard's argument that "knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government" (1984: 8–9). The possessor of knowledge decides upon the subsequent action; therefore, knowledge determines governmental decisions. The course of action adopted by the US government after 9/11 is, in this sense, allegedly the result of acquired knowledge and required justice. But is this really the case? *Stuff Happens* questions the status of knowledge and the concomitant idea of justice that has shaped post-9/11 American politics and history.

In *Stuff Happens*, it is quite clear that the politics of this "fictional" world concentrates on two basic forms of metanarrative used to legitimise knowledge in the age of modernity, namely metanarrative of emancipation and metanarrative of totalisation. These metanarratives are embedded in the talks given in the press conferences and the public and private dialogues of statesmen. In the play, the selected dialogues featuring President Bush are full of references falling within one of the two aforementioned metanarratives. Bush interchangeably employs both of these metanarratives to legitimate his political manoeuvres. Therefore, it seems necessary to focus, one by one, on these metanarratives here in order to avert any later confusion. After clarifying these two types of metanarratives, the deconstructive techniques employed in *Stuff Happens* uses will be examined.

To recall Lyotard's meaning of "metanarrative of emancipation," it can be said that people or "humanity" possess or possesses true knowledge, and "its [humanity's] epic story is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself" (1984: 35). For this approach, anything that people approve of leads them to freedom and progress. As state leaders are the reflected images of this consent, their choices may also be considered as those of the people. A political leader may assume the role of a hero in this philosophy. His/her decisions are deemed to be true, and they allegedly "[work] towards a good ethico-political end – universal peace" (1984: xxiv). Many statements Bush makes in *Stuff Happens* are products of the mentality created by the metanarrative of emancipation. As the head of the nation, of the people of the US, the President favours his own political actions after the 9/11 attacks as reasonable decisions to lead his people to progress. He appears to assign himself the role of the hero who has to save not only the US but also the whole world. The hero's mission, in this case, is not confined to the US; it demands the peace and freedom of the entire Middle East because it is considered to be a threat to the freedom of the US. Consequently, Hare repetitively quotes from different speeches of the President to emphasise the pragmatic use of the discourse of emancipation:

> "BUSH. Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And the freedom will be defended." (Hare, 2006: 16)
> [. . .]
> "Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility towards America and to support terror. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of

evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. [. . .]

History has called America and our allies to action. Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory." (Hare, 2006: 32–33).

Simultaneously, other politicians supporting Bush's argument, like Blair, join in the rhetoric of freedom and make similar statements as follows: "This is not a battle between the US of America and terrorism but between the free and democratic world and terrorism" (Hare, 2006: 17). So, such a proclamation resulted from a historical and epic mission the West, from Bush and Blair's perspective, is expected to undertake to neutralise "an axis of evil" – identified by Bush as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea on 29 January 2002.

Although this emphasis on freedom is triggered by the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the WTC, the ultimate knowledge legitimated by this metanarrative of emancipation is that Saddam Hussein is a vicious dictator who can even poison his own people and that he has the potential means to produce weapons of mass destruction and cooperate with terrorist organisations, an intolerable threat to the security of all great nations. In response to this threat, in *Stuff Happens*, parallel to reality, the President of the US, as the alleged protector of freedom and civilisation, accompanied by the PM of England, commence a military intervention.

Lyotard suggests in his analysis that the metanarrative of emancipation is not limited to the claim of truth; it also bases the idea of justice on the consent of people. This means that even their prescriptive statements, which are usually solidified into norms, are accepted to be just. Unsurprisingly, the language used by Bush and the other politicians, the decision makers of the US, appeal to the prescriptive language used to give moral judgements based on cultural values rather than on positivist knowledge. Lyotard argues that prescriptive language does not (only) claim the legitimacy of an empirical statement like "The earth revolves around the sun," but this kind of language lays claim to the legitimacy of normative statements like "Carthage should be destroyed" (1984: 36). However, it should also be stressed at this point that the pretended authority of the politicians does not exactly reflect people's consent. Rather, it is the politicians who misuse such a metanarrative. As Blair himself reports in the play, the British public does not wholly support the govern-

ment's decision to wage a war in Iraq. In a private talk with Bush, Blair mentions his concerns: "In the event of your considering armed action against Iraq, the British Parliament – and I'd say still more the British people – won't go along without UN support" (Hare, 2006: 38). It is Blair who, relying on his supposed political authority to represent the people, hastens the process of joining the war on the side of the US to prove his reliability as an ally.

The negotiations between Bush and Blair, before the US embarks on military action against Iraq, are given particular prominence in *Stuff Happens*. During one visit in Crawford, Texas, they go for a long private walk to discuss political issues. Although their conversation during this walk is not documented, judging from their renowned position, Hare creates a dialogue in which Blair makes an effort to convince Bush to await the UN's sanction before engaging Iraq. The words the playwright chooses, probably inspired by the other speeches of the PM, present an overt example of the prescriptive statements used in the metanarrative of emancipation (Hare, 2006: 41) Possessing knowledge about the threat Saddam poses to the Western world, the Western politicians, particularly the American government and Tony Blair in *Stuff Happens*, become the "legislators" – Lyotard's definition of such people – with the right to give the logical verdict to be pronounced on Iraq. They prescribe that the West must undertake military intervention against Saddam Hussein and progress must be brought to the Middle East.

In *Stuff Happens*, the basic difference between Bush and Blair is their approach to the acquiescence of the UN in taking military action. As people are considered to be the source of their authority, the two leaders look for public support for their political decisions. In particular Blair, whose public strongly demands the involvement of the UN in the war against Iraq, constantly scrutinises the popular vote in order to ensure he has not lost the support of his electors. Once, he even faces losing the support of his own ministers and is torn between the English Parliament and the Bush government. Not to be seen to sever Britain's old alliance with the US, he wants to act together with the Americans, but the British people do not legitimise a conclusion finalised by the Bush government.

It is not only a single version of metanarratives that is used to legitimise the idea of waging a war on Iraq in *Stuff Happens*. The second version, named the Hegelian metanarrative or the metanarrative of speculation by Lyotard, is also visibly enacted in the statements uttered by the politicians. This type of metanarrative asserts that knowledge is based on

a self-guaranteeing and self-referential autonomy and that such an autonomy emerges from an ultimate metanarrator like a Spirit or God. This metasubject legitimises the knowledge produced by "the empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures" (1984: 34). Any knowledge attributed to this metasubject, either denotative or prescriptive, is deemed to be true or legitimate. Anybody referring to the "Spirit" or another metanarrator as the source of his knowledge may claim veracity, and there is no agent to speak for the "Spirit." In *Stuff Happens*, it is demonstrated that metasubjects like "Spirit" and "History" play a pivotal role in constructing the present reality. It is "History [that] has called America and [its] allies to action," in Bush's own words (Hare, 2006: 33). Hence, "History" calling the West forth is, in fact, one of the metasubjects that decides upon the legitimacy of the forthcoming action. In a similar vein, "God," another alleged source of Bush's conduct, becomes the guaranteeing metanarrator:

> "BUSH. I could not be governor if I did not believe in a divine plan which supersedes all human plans.
> AN ACTOR. When he runs for President, he observes:
> BUSH. I feel like God wants me to run for President. I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen and at that time my country is going to need me. I know it won't be easy, on me or on my family, but God wants me to do it." (Hare, 2006: 9).

As a consequence of the authority coming from such a guarantor and legitimising metanarrative, he is relieved of responsibility for the things he does. His knowledge is self-referential and does not require an explanation. So, he has the right to say, "I'm the commander – see, I don't need to explain. I don't need to explain why I say things." (Hare, 2006: 9). This uncompromising attitude of the President coheres with his attitude towards the cabinet members. He usually just listens and keeps his distance from the ministers. Furthermore, Bush filters his argument through his secretary, Condoleezza Rice. Most of the time, she speaks on behalf of the President and pre-emptively takes the blame by saying, "You'll say, sir, if I misrepresent you?" (Hare, 2006: 10). Therefore, if there happens to be a mistake, it does not stem from the President, the speaker of the metanarrative, but from the secretary.

The production and exchange of knowledge in *Stuff Happens* refers to the performatively efficient knowledge that Lyotard defines. The saleable knowledge is created and distributed to American society. The value of

knowledge is not based on its truth but on its market performance, that is, as long as it is politically saleable, its performance also increases its value. The political action in *Stuff Happens* discloses that the heads of the American and British governments resort to these postmodern methods of knowledge production after 9/11, despite the fact that they appeal to modern metanarratives of legitimation. They constantly produce new ideas and look for the potential of legitimation by means of performativity. Much as they do not accept the multiplicity of truth or reality – a significant postmodern precept –Mark Wessendorf claims that the conservative Bush government does not hesitate to misuse the postmodern understanding of history and reality for legitimating their political actions (2007: 328–29). The explanations of a senior advisor to Bush, reported by Ron Suskind, who meets the advisor at a meeting in the summer of 2002, also proves Wessendorf claims:

> "The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." (2014: para. 62).

The constant production of "reality," which turns into knowledge while being studied, implies a belief in the truth of each reality they create, but it obviously neglects the other perspectives on this specific form of reality. Production of reality and knowledge and its consumption override the truth value of reality and knowledge. It is not the truth Bush and his cronies look for, but a truth they could support with some proof and sell to the public. In this respect, in one of the speeches they remind again of the persecutions of Saddam and the historical duty of the West; in another speech, they claim the approval of a divine power, while in yet another, they mention the existence of WMDs threatening peace. By producing a variety of knowledge, the Bush government addresses a range of people with different worldviews. Conservatives, liberals, nationalists, and the like are expected to buy a product from this assortment of distinct kinds of knowledge.

At the beginning of the play, in one such scene, CIA director George Tenet gives a briefing on the production of WMDs in Iraq and presents some pictures (Hare, 2006: 12-13). Although the pictures do not show anything but a factory with constant coming and going, the cabinet members, excluding Powell, seem inclined to believe that these are evidence of the existence of the weapons. However, the major scene featuring knowledge production takes place behind closed doors and involves the figure of Blair. To create room for political manoeuvre and direct public opinion, Blair asks for the help of the US intelligence service and demands saleable knowledge (Hare, 2006: 45-46. When the dossier is completed, after being revised for further information about the production of weapons, again at the request of Blair, the published version starts to shape the reality of the British media. "The immediate threat" demanded by the PM Blair is fulfilled when a document in the dossier reveals that Saddam has WMDs which can be readied for launching within forty-five minutes:

> "AN ACTOR. It becomes a headline all over the world.
> EVENING STANDARD. Forty-five minutes to attack.
> AN ACTOR. In private, George Tenet, Head of the CIA, refers to the claims as:
> TENET. The 'they-can-attack-in-forty-five-minutes' shit." (Hare, 2006: 64).

Although it is not certain that Iraq produces WMDs, the most efficient input/output ratio is supplied via the knowledge of their existence. As the heads of state, and indirectly the heads of the intelligence services, Bush and Blair can claim such performative knowledge and try to legitimate the impending war.

For Lyotard, language games occupy a significant place in the construction of and reliance on metanarratives in politics. An examination of *Stuff Happens* without a reference to the language games in the play would, therefore, be incomplete. The political discourse built on the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing negotiations to decide upon the trajectory of the forthcoming war are carried out according to the commonly held rules agreed by the present "game players," the Western politicians. The two sides of the game – the US and Britain on one side, the member nations of the UN like France, Germany, and Russia on the other – make reciprocal moves to determine whether the Iraq government should be given more time to cooperate in the investigation of the existence of WMDs or whether an immediate military intervention should be commenced. American

politicians, with the exception of Powell, seem to be convinced that Iraq has already wasted enough opportunities and that action is long overdue. However, there is a question mark hovering in the background: Where does Iraq stand in this game? Is Iraq, as a subject, a part of this game, or is it another game with different rules that is being played by Iraq?

Stuff Happens demonstrates that the language games played in the field of world politics constitute the epistemology of a war fought in a distant land and that the players of the game may be unaware of or insensible to the ontology of the war and the physical burdens it places on people. The play disturbingly lacks any dramatization of the reality outside the political realm of the West. Scenes of the collapse of the towers, or people dying in Afghanistan and Iraq, or cities turned upside down are not allowed to enter this realm. Bottoms highlights that *Stuff Happens* is "a play that does demonstrate an explicit awareness that it was in the fine details of the *language* used during the run-up to war that the 'real story' lies" (2006: 60). In this respect, the play relies on the moves and countermoves each side – Bush, Powell, and Europe – make to overcome its opponent's politics. For instance, the members of the UN demand more than one resolution be taken; President Bush confirms: "We will work with the UN security council for the necessary *resolutions* [emphasis added]" (Hare, 2006: 66). On the other side, "*The Downing Street Group*" watches Jacque Chirac's statements on TV asserting that France will on no account – even if the US and Britain obtain a second resolution – agree to wage war on Iraq:

> "CAMPBELL. I've got his words here. 'Whatever the circumstances.' France will vote no 'whatever the circumstances'. It's perfect. It's perfect for us. We put out a statement saying there's no further negotiation because whatever happens, the French won't play.
> BLAIR. But he did say 'tonight'. Chirac said that's the position *tonight*.
> CAMPBELL. Of course he did say 'tonight!' Of course he did say 'tonight!' But he also said 'whatever is the circumstances'." (Hare, 2006: 110).

In this sense, the language games played among Bush, his cabinet, Blair, and the other European politicians give rise to lingual competitions as these players try to contrive a proper decision about Iraq. It is not the facts about Iraq that establishes the truth but the winner of the language games.

Hare's conscious ignorance of the object of these discussions until the very end of the play most probably culminates in moral discomfort for

the reader/audience. To dwell on this point with reference to Fiona Tolan's explanation, the absence of the Iraqis should bring about "a recognition that something is fundamentally wrong when a play about Iraq can be entirely populated with non-Iraqi politicians" (2010: 80). It is not hard to conceive that the Western politicians and Iraqi citizens would not share the same values and perspectives on the Iraq War or the invasion of Iraq. This is reminiscent of Lyotard's disbelief in metanarratives and the emphasis he puts on the incommensurability of language games. The rules of the games played in world politics, particularly in Western politics, do not follow the same standards as the rules of the language games the Iraqis play. While history is being written about Iraq, it is the truth of the non-Iraqis that shapes this history.

Nevertheless, language games may sometimes be more than just simple moves and countermoves. For the sake of performance/efficiency, according to Lyotard, "the decision makers" may sometimes break the social bonds tying the players together, break the language game, and demand the opposing player(s) "be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear" (1984: xxiv). This is no longer a part of the language game "because the efficacy of such force is based entirely on the threat to eliminate the opposing player, not on making a better 'move' than he" (Lyotard, 1984: 46). Therefore, they try to conclude the game by force, as evidenced in the dialogue below:

> "BUSH. Colin, I think we've reached a fork in the road. We're at that fork. I don't think there is a way around this. These inspections are a distraction. They weaken us. They weaken our purpose.
> [. . .]
> I've made a decision. If you have a problem with that decision, best thing is you should speak. You should say something now. I've invited you in. I'm giving you a chance to say something now.
> *They look at each other. There is a long silence.*
> It would be a big thing if you disagreed. Well?
> POWELL. I don't disagree.
> *Bush nods satisfied. Powell gets up.*
> Thank you, sir. Thank you for telling me.
> *Powell goes out.*" (Hare, 2006: 90- 91).

Powell draws his opposition back because otherwise it is tacitly implied that he will be side lined. The silence between Bush and Powell emphasises the seriousness of the situation and a similar silence prevails

during the moments when Bush forces his opponents to change their decisions.

Powell is the only player who sincerely stands against the idea of war, which makes him the central figure in the play. "Indeed," Jeanne Colleran sums up, "much of the play seems interested in how and why a distinguished and ethical man, who is both popular and persuasive, becomes so ineffectual" (2012: 153). From the very beginning of the play, Powell assumes a pro-peace pose, and he does not escape confronting the hawkish cabinet of the President. In *Stuff Happens*, Powell's colleagues in the cabinet, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, are respectively described as "towel-snapper" (Hare, 2006: 5) and "velociraptor" (7); Dick Cheney, of similar character, says that he "never met a weapons system [he] didn't vote for" (6). Against such politicians, Powell adopts a policy that envisages war as the last resort.

Another distinctive quality of Powell is that he is the only one among them to have first-hand experience of war. The reason behind his prudent approach to war is that he is familiar with the ontology of war which is disclosed when he says, "After Vietnam, many in my generation vowed that when our turn came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in half-hearted warfare for half-baked reasons. Politicians start wars; soldiers fight and die in them" (Hare, 2006: 4). As regards the other members of the cabinet, it is clear that they are involved only in the theory of war instead of the physical reality of it. In the play, Rumsfeld works as "an assistant to Richard Nixon" at Princeton (5); Cheney achieves "five student deferments in order to avoid being drafted to Vietnam" (5); Rice is busy with "choosing between a professional music career or a life in academia" (6); and Wolfowitz, at another university, philosophises about the Vietnam War saying, "An over-expenditure of American power" (7). The rules of the language game Powell brings from his military quarters do not correspond with the rules of the language game the others learn from academia. The harsh realities of war – the death of thousands of people – mean nothing but mere numbers that cannot disclose the meaning they are fraught with. War is, in this respect, nothing but an execution or demonstration of power.

Even if the knowledge Powell possesses seems more accurate and reasonably close to the ontology of war, it does not legitimate the arguments he presents. While discussing the status of scientific knowledge, Lyotard suggests that

> "legitimation is the process by which a 'legislator' dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe the stated conditions (in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification) determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse for consideration by the scientific community." (1984: 8).

Along the same lines, political knowledge is legitimated by the political community, and the same community determines what is legitimate or true and what is not. Although Powell does not shy away from lecturing the President and the other politicians, he does not realise that he no longer belongs to the US military and that those around him are not veteran soldiers. He believes that "the army is the most democratic institution in America" (Hare, 2006: 4) and the government should be the same. That is why he is of the opinion that they, as representatives of a republic, should be different from the Romans who would punish a whole community for a single assassin targeting a senator. However, Colleran states, Powell does not want to see Bush and the others acting with "an imperial mentality" and

> "[w]ith so sure a sense of historical destiny in the President, and so arrogant a sense of historical exceptionalism among his deputies, the invasion of Iraq [is] indeed inevitable. The protocols of consultation, debate, evidence, policy, law – these Republican ideals for which Powell stands count for nothing in an empire." (2012: 154).

Finally, he chooses to fall into line and renounces his pro-peace policy to remain among the decision makers. Otherwise, it is likely that Powell would have been dismissed from the cabinet and perpetually lose his right to make a considered move in the game.

In short, it is possible to sum up this part of the analysis of *Stuff Happens* by recognising that knowledge, particularly historical knowledge, without having to reveal reality as it is, only legitimises a specific version of reality through the consensus of a certain group. "The 'people' (the nation, or even humanity), and especially their political institutions," Lyotard comments, "are not content to know – they legislate. That is, they formulate prescriptions that have the status of norms" (1984: 31). The American government legitimises its knowledge through the use of the above-mentioned metanarratives and brings out new rules and norms to vilify the Iraq regime, not allowing any opposition to their truth to be expressed.

The three different ways of legitimation named by Lyotard – the metanarratives of emancipation and totalisation, and performativity – do not actually leave any scope for alternative historical narratives. They are based on a consensus among the decision makers, and "[s]uch consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games" (1984: xxv). However, postmodernism lays emphasis on minor narratives and provides a platform for dissident language games that do not comply with the rules of the metanarratives. Lyotard relates that "[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (1984: xxv). In other words, it does reject the consensus reached or built by the decision makers and instead provides multiplicity which does not necessarily follow the same rules.

Lyotard has recourse to paralogy to fragment the alleged unity and certainty of a metanarrative. Paralogy can be simply defined as a dissent from the established rules of a normative language game and it draws attention to discrepant language games. It does not yield to causal determinism and rejects considering reason as "a universal and immutable human faculty or principle but as a specific and variable human production" (Woodward: para. 27). It does not allow the reduction of truth by the modern metanarrative to a unique and totalising entity, but refers to the multiplicity of narratives and truths. Consequently, paralogy gives voice to the various demands of justice and prevents prescriptive utterances from taking the place of norms. It forces divergent local discourses to be taken into consideration without giving priority to a unique way of judgement.

Considering the textual and technical details of *Stuff Happens*, it can be argued that this play itself is a piece of paralogy. The conflict over the use of the real and the fictional in the play actually emanates from the game Hare plays against traditions. His claim to veracity, coupled paradoxically with his emphasis on the fictionality of the play, is a part of this game. In addition to that, the play "exposes a certain self-conscious tension around the generic location of this work [*Stuff Happens*]: as journalism, documentary, dramatization, fact, fiction, history, news, report, commentary" (Tolan, 2010: 75). Apparently, the writer rejects abiding by the rules of verbatim theatre or docudrama and creates a postmodern pastiche of different forms with its own self-determined rules. This is

what Lyotard expects from a postmodern writer, that is, to reproduce the present rules:

> "A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of the art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been don*e." (1984: 81).

The aesthetic disobedience Hare "commits" in *Stuff Happens* does not only jeopardise the determinacy of grand narratives, particularly of history, but also questions the reliability of the play's own dramatic representation. The play foregrounds the constructed nature of the theatrical accounts given by the politicians by showing the backstage or the talks conducted behind closed doors. However, it also exposes that the drama in the play is yet another construction. For this reason, Colleran compares docudrama to "historiographic metafiction, [for calling] attention to its own methods and biases" and formulates its strategy as follows:

> "Simply remounting the event, even if the set replicates the exact details of the original place and the language is verbatim, places the spectator in a position of a doubled critical consciousness. Reframed, verisimilitude becomes a strategy through which to counter the relentless visibility of real-time media and its tacit claims of authenticity." (2012: 139).

This double consciousness invites the readers or the audience to adopt a critical perception of what they see and requires a sceptical approach not only to the play but also to the realities they confront in the media.

As for the reframed structure Colleran touches upon, the legacy of the Brechtian notion of verisimilitude provides such a structure. The epic elements Hare employs in *Stuff Happens* also help illuminate the artificial nature of the play and of the media-covered images of reality. They reframe the events, with which the reader/audience is already familiar, and demand a reconsideration of the familiar grand narratives. In this respect, the epic narrator, the inter-scene "external" commenters, the multiple role casting, and the cinematographically fragmented structure give a new impulse to the allegedly verbatim content of the play.

It is the epic narrator, An Actor, that opens the play and warns the reader/audience about the dilemma between the real and the unreal that they are about to confront. S/he wants them to keep a critical distance to detect any mistake in the present performance and s/he does not want them to feel assured of the truth of the play. This role of the narrator is played by different actors/actresses and s/he is generally there to accomplish diverse functions: S/he introduces the settings and the characters and punctuates the rapid flow of changing scenes; s/he gives brief information about the forthcoming character and his/her statements; above all, the epic narrator is one of the most prominent techniques Hare uses in *Stuff Happens* to deconstruct the metanarratives or the historical reality the political elites try to develop. The narrator's comments and informative statements expose the weaknesses of the political arguments and announce the counter arguments that distract the integrity of the metanarratives.

At the beginning of the play, it is the same narrator who introduces Cheney's recurrent student deferments to escape Vietnam War and the lack of practical experience of war of the cabinet members Rice, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz. S/he reduces the reliability of these politicians as historical actors and exposes secret or lesser known information about the suspected reasons for the Iraq War. S/he implies that this war is not about freedom or the emancipation of the Iraqi people, and thereby, s/he arouses suspicion in the reader/audience:

> "AN ACTOR. Asked in 2003, whether he still has a connection with the company Halliburton, Dick Cheney claims:
> CHENEY. Since I left Halliburton to become George Bush's Vice President, I've severed all my ties with the company, gotten rid of all my financial interest. I have no financial interest in Halliburton of any kind and haven't had, now, for over three years.
> AN ACTOR. In fact Cheney is still receiving deferred compensation and owns more than 433,000 stock options. Those options were worth 241,498 in 2004. They are now worth eight million. Halliburton has ten billion dollars of no-bid contracts in Iraq." (Hare, 2006: 116-17).

The narrator does not explain what Halliburton is; nevertheless, it is already understood that the war does not arise from humane intentions. It is too complicated to be squeezed into metanarratives. The historical reality contains complexity, and it cannot be reduced to metanarratives. Such details reject reducing historical reality into a cause and effect relation-

ship. The narrator, in this sense, undermines the metanarratives Bush, Cheney or Rumsfeld seize upon.

The other epic element in *Stuff Happens*, crucial for refuting the metanarratives and emphasising the difficulty of constructing a unitary and complete version of history, is the fragmented structure of the play. The action in the play has a cinematographic flow, and it constantly shifts from one setting to another. First, the setting is Bush's press conference at the White House, in the next moment it shifts to Downing Street with Blair, then Powell in discussion with the French Foreign Minister Dominique De Villepin, while the next scene returns to the White House and a meeting of Bush and Hans Blix. Furthermore, these scenes cover such a wide span of issues that it becomes impossible for the play to hide the gaps left between the narrated parts of the conflict. Nevertheless, this – the impossibility of constructing a complete or coherent history – appears to be what Hare actually intends to accentuate. Soto-Moretti also underlines this: "[T]he point is not that his strange constructions *explain* things – simply that they remind us of how difficult it is to encompass the massive over determination of a complex moment in history without continually 'writing in the margins' or groping for a summary in the face of the 'un-sum-up-able'" (2005: 318). Comparatively, Lyotard warns the writers saying, "it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented" (1984: 81). To put it differently, a postmodern writer should not be expected to present and/or claim reality in his work; he should rather focus on the unpresentability of reality:

> "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable." (Lyotard, 1984: 81).

Therefore, *Stuff Happens* can be regarded as the summary of the "un-sum-up-able" or the presentation of the unpresentable. Its fragmentation, flitting from one place to another, is, in this sense, the result of a consciously failed attempt to present the history of the war. The aim is not to "enjoy" this presentation, but to recognise that history is "unpresentable."

With epic techniques, Hare does not allow the reader/audience to identify with the characters in his play. As already indicated, he fore-

grounds the human and error-prone nature of his characters. Lyotard suggests that in contemporary society it is no longer viable to identify with "nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions" and that "'[i]dentifying' with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history, is becoming more and more difficult" (1984: 14). The epic techniques employed in *Stuff Happens* serves this purpose, that is, they display the constructed identity of the politicians and preclude the reader/audience's identification. When the play begins, again an epic technique, "*the cast are already assembling on stage*" (Hare, 2006: 3). The gap between the actors and the characters is highlighted from the very beginning. To create a similar effect, Hare also uses the multiple-role casting technique. The same actor plays, for instance, the roles of both Saddam and the Iraqi Exile.

The same structure also functions as the antidote for the grand narratives offered for consideration in the play. In particular, the "external" inter-scenes between the fragments reject all the emancipatory, totalising or performativity metanarratives and disprove the metanarratives with minor narratives or language games that belong to the marginalised or the "terrorised." For Lyotard, the deconstruction of grand narratives "leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion" (1984: 15). This is why history becomes unpresentable in the postmodern era. There are so many "atoms" that it becomes impossible to bring them together or to define a single way of alignment – which can be equal to a grand narrative in narrative knowledge. Therefore, Hare selects a number of disregarded atoms – the minor narratives – and shows that grand narratives and history are not, or at least may not be, consistent.

The external characters interrupting the course of the play are the best examples of these minor narratives. As previously discussed, only the first "external" commenter aligns himself with the political grand narratives. The remaining four characters all uncover the major defects of the grand narratives and remind the reader that reality cannot be locked into the meeting halls or conference rooms of executive residences. Each of these four characters deserves to be separately examined to underline the writer's main criticism of war politics after 9/11. The second external commenter is also a politician, together with being a member of the New Labour Party. He has been among the proponents of war, and he believes that the West has the responsibility to save the Iraqi people. Nevertheless,

his speech reveals that even the Party has not reached a concurrent resolution, and "[l]ifelong friendships have been tested, tested again, and finally destroyed" because of the internal conflicts (Hare, 2006: 31). More significantly, he also accepts that the performative knowledge produced about WMDs has relied on non-existing weapons. Consequently, the inconsistency of the metanarrative of emancipation is highlighted while the arguments about the legitimacy of Iraq's invasion are still being discussed in the White House.

The first two viewpoints presented by Hare seem to have consensus with the language game of the US government, and they support the idea of waging war on Iraq. Nevertheless, the remaining three viewpoints or external commenters show the impossibility of consensus in contemporary society. Lyotard accentuates that metanarratives are no longer viable because contemporary society encompasses various language games, and they reject any universal consensus that "could embrace the totality of metaprescriptions regulating the totality of statements circulating in the social collectivity" (1984: 65). Lyotard defines metaprescriptions as "what the moves of language games must be in order to be admissible" (1984: 65). Lyotard's argument simply states that there are no rules that can define a universal viewpoint but there is constant dissent and counter arguments coming from different local groups. The minor narratives emerging from these three external narrators break the alleged consensus on war. They epitomise the existence of opposition and dissent against war.

The first of these dissident perspectives belongs to a Palestinian Academic. The play, for the first time, gives a voice to a character who is part of the turmoil created in the Middle East. In its entirety, this comment made by the Academic discloses a minor narrative that focuses on the "real" reasons behind the war. She is representing a group of local people who have been victimised by the aggressive Israeli state, and she uses controversial prescriptions to deny the legitimacy of the Iraq War. The significance of this comment lies in how it discredits the metaprescriptions Bush casts on the legitimacy of pursuing armed interference in Iraq. First of all, she, the Academic, indicates that it is "ten years past [Hussein's] peak of belligerence" and asks, "Why Iraq? Why now?" (Hare, 2006: 57) to which there is a long list of answers: for democracy, for Osama Bin Laden, for oil, and so on. Then, she continues with the Palestinian way of answering that question, that is, for "defending the America's three-billion-dollar-a-year-colony in the Middle East" (Hare, 2006: 57).

Defining Palestinians as "the Jews of the Jews" (Hare, 2006: 58), she finds it hypocritical to demand the UN resolution for Iraq and to ignore Israel's atrocities against Palestine. "Justice and freedom," says the Palestinian Academic, "are the causes of the West – but never extended to a people expelled from their land and forbidden any right to return. Terror is condemned, but state-sanctioned murder is green-lit" (Hare, 2006: 57). This is an explanation which causes the ideas of justice and freedom legitimated by the metanarratives of the West to suddenly wither away. In other words, the Academic's minor, peripheral narrative enters the realm of the language games, rejects the metanarrative of emancipation, and disrupts the putative consensus.

A Brit in New York, coming to the stage as the fourth inter-scene commenter, extends the criticism of the Palestinian Academic, voicing an argument that has been veiled by the politically motivated metanarratives. He presents an alternative answer to the question, "Is it just and true to invade Iraq in response to the 9/11 attacks?" A saleswoman's satisfaction with the US's bombardment of Iraq prompts him to say:

> "BRIT IN NEW YORK. Somebody steals your handbag, so you kill their second cousin, on the grounds they live close. [. . .] Saudi Arabia is financing Al Qaeda. Iran, Lebanon and Syria are known to shelter terrorists. North Korea is developing a nuclear weapons programme. All these you leave alone. No, you go to war with the one place in the region admitted to have no connection with terrorism." (Hare, 2006: 92).

He firmly shakes the prescriptive statements used to legitimate the war against Iraq. When the saleswoman says, "You don't understand, you're not American," the Brit responds to disclose the naiveté of such an argument:

> "'You don't understand. We're Palestinian, we're Chechen, we're Irish, we're Basque?' If the principle of international conduct is now to be that you may go against anyone you like on the grounds that you've been hurt by somebody else, does that apply to everyone? Or just to America?" (Hare, 2006: 92-93).

The Brit, therefore, rejects the idea of taking revenge on the distant cousins of the attackers and delegitimises the prescriptive utterances put forward by the leading politicians. His point of view is crucial to illustrate that the multiplicity of the language games does not merely spring from different national perspectives or from the East-West dichotomy (Pales-

tinian and Iraqi characters are providing the Eastern perspective). Multiplicity is also a characteristic of Western society. For the saleswoman the Brit speaks to, every Western people must understand the US's grief and must consent to the prescriptive utterances made about Iraq and Saddam. The Brit's argument becomes an example of paralogy for the saleswoman's prescriptive utterance. He shows that, following a similar reasoning, many other nations can start a war and this can turn the world into a battlefield. This perspective of paralogy also demonstrates the dissent among various Western groups against the presumption of the consensus for war. Since they are not adequately foregrounded in the mainstream media, these narratives are also marginalised and infrequently encountered. By highlighting the anti-war attitude of a British citizen in the US, Hare puts emphasis on the impossibility of a consensus even on a national level.

The closing remarks of the play belong to the most "marginalised" character of the play: an Iraqi Exile. His experience can be considered the reflection of the metanarratives of freedom and totality in Iraq. The play crosschecks if these metanarratives really bring peace, freedom, and progress to Iraq. There are hints in the play implying the negative results of the war, but it is the first time that the reader/audience hears a local citizen's thoughts. He is integrated into the language game of the play, and it is meaningful that he is given the last words in it. Lyotard suggests that the language games never arrive at a consensus but they end with paralogy. His presentation of reality closes the play with a paralogy. All the statements made by Bush, Powell, Blair, Cheney, et al. cannot produce a conclusion. It is rather a counter-statement that negates all the previous realities.

The Iraqi Exile can be considered the closest among all the other characters to the reality of war, but his voice remains unheard until the very end of the play. Thus, it becomes laden with different layers of meaning, potentially remains in the reader/audience's mind the longest, and stresses the exclusion of the "other's" coverage in the prominent media. To begin with, the character makes it clear how insulting "stuff happens" – a simple statement for the speaker – is for an Iraqi citizen: "It seemed to me the most racist remark I had ever heard" (Hare, 2006: 119) since this is a statement that reduces the death of the Iraqi people to the degree of "stuff". Similarly, he complains about the fact that the lives of the Iraqis are deemed less significant than those of the Americans: "And now the American dead are counted, their numbers recorded, their coffins

draped in flags. How many Iraqis have died? How many civilians? No figure is given. Our dead are uncounted" (Hare, 2006: 119-20). This attitude towards Iraq and Iraqi citizens obviously frustrates the character. Bush's recourse to the metanarrative of emancipation does not seem to work for the Iraqi Exile. He does not feel emancipated but persecuted.

In his monologue, the Iraqi Exile complains about the "grand politicians" for plunging Iraq into chaos, but his criticism is not only limited to them. He also criticises the Iraqi citizens and, though implicitly, the American citizens for allowing the worst possible person to take control of the country:

> "IRAQI EXILE. I mean, if there is a word, Iraq has been crucified. By Saddam's sins, by ten years of sanctions by the occupation and by the insurgency. Basically it's a story of a nation that has failed in only one thing. But it's a big sin. It failed to take charge of itself. And that means the worst person in the country took charge. A country's leader is the country's own fault.
> I mean, people say to me, "Look, tell America." I tell them: "You are putting faith in the wrong person. Don't expect America or anybody will do it for you. If you don't do it yourself, this is what you get." (Hare, 2006: 120).

In response to the religious Christian terminology Bush evokes to start the war, Hare, too, uses a similar vocabulary and chooses the word "crucifixion" for the current situation of Iraq. It clearly refers to Bush's appeal to God as the source of his prescriptive statements for striking Iraq, which is a part of the metanarrative of totalisation. This choice of Christian jargon also matches the imperial approach Bush and his cabinet adopt, that is, Christ was crucified by the Roman Empire and crucifixion was a method the Romans used to punish their enemies. Hamilton states that, "the word intends to remind the audience of the religious aspect of Bush's war" and "deconstruct the notion of the US as a savior of the Iraqi people, demonstrating that the US is instead a persecutor—and ultimately, a crucifier—of Iraq" (2007: 32). However, Christianity itself also becomes a victim in the play because "by using fundamentalism to fight fundamentalism, [Bush exploits] a peaceful religion as a pretext for war" (2007: 32). Consequently, Hare's use of such ecclesiastic vocabulary draws attention to the principals of the US's ruling community, and to the extremist thought of an allegedly Muslim group, El Kaide, who use its own religious misconception to legitimise killing innocent people. While Bush uses Christianity and the God Christians believe in, a similar metanarrative is created by

the terrorist groups who use Islam and God, again, to legitimise their narratives. By comparing these two associations, Hare deconstructs both of their foundations.

In this respect, the last words of the Iraqi Exile stand as a recommendation not only for the Americans but also for the Iraqis for taking further responsibility in the control of their country: "Don't expect America or anybody will do it for you. If you don't do it yourself, this is what you get" (Hare, 2006: 120). This is a conclusion that Soto-Moretti finds contrasts with the rest of the play:

> "Hare's last word seems to offer a notion of historical salvation that appears to have no connection whatever with his demonstrated apprehension and dramatic representation of the motor forces of history throughout the whole of the preceding piece, nor with the way in which his play illustrates how that history is shaped in the hands of the powerful." (2005: 313).

It is hard to disagree with Soto-Moretti in that it would be too much to expect Iraqi citizens to turn Iraq, which Soto-Moretti points out is a relatively young country manipulated by American politics and by local dictators (2005: 313), into an exemplary state in a trice. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Hare's antithetical ending may be interpreted as a part of his plan. The play creates a dramatic effect with this contrast drawing attention to the minor voices or forces, which do not necessarily comply but most of the time contrast with the grand narratives, overshadowed by the "motor forces of history," noted by Soto-Moretti.

Stuff Happens can also be interpreted as a cry against the metanarratives constructing the history of the US and Iraq, and it shows that history cannot be reduced to the metanarratives constructed by their leaders. From this perspective, the play is reminiscent of Lyotard's understanding of history:

> "The meaning of history [. . .] does not only show itself in the great deeds and misdeeds of the agents or actors who become famous in history, but also in the feeling of the obscure and distant spectators who see and hear them and who, in the sound and fury of *the res gestae*, distinguish between what is just and what is not." (1989: 402-03).

Therefore, not only the political resolutions negotiated in the meetings of the American government or in the halls of the UN, but also the feelings and thoughts of the people sitting in the living rooms of their

houses in Baghdad or watching or hearing the events from other parts of the world, like this Iraqi Exile, have to be taken into consideration while talking about history.

Conclusion

Stuff Happens is, in this sense, a piece of paralogy which goes against established historical narration, that is, the officially recorded, mostly accepted as "true" history of a national state. Self-conscious about the unpresentability of history, the play becomes a part of postmodern historiography and harbours informal alternatives to the official reality. Becoming a part of the historical myth to which Gipson-King refers (2010: 165), *Stuff Happens* prevents history from becoming a conclusive reality. Its effect may be weak or strong; still, it seems likely to leave its mark on the future. In the contemporary world of technology, reality alters so fast that the reader/audience may become immune to this flow and fail to recognise that their truth does not remain the same. Late in the play, a statistic, added later by Hare to a newer version, regarding the support of American society for the war is given. According to this statistic, in 2005, forty-seven per cent of the American electorate still believe that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in the planning of the 9/11 attacks. Forty-four per cent believe the hijackers were Iraqi. In other words, quite a few of the electorate still believe in the notion of a mistake or a lie, so much so that even two years after the attacks they cannot recognise its absurdity.

Revealing the absurdity of the past from a present perspective of the characters, *Stuff Happens* juxtaposes the conflictual statements uttered by the same person over a couple of hours and harries the characters in comparing the past and the present. Condensing the years into a much shorter time, the play reveals the absurdity of the changes in thought. Powell's explanations of WMDs, for instance, provide striking examples of political manoeuvre. In scene twenty one, Powell makes his "Powell buy-in" presentation – as it is called by the White House communications director Dan Bartlett – to defend the case of the US against Saddam Hussein in the UN. In this presentation, in February 2003, Powell confirms the credibility of his information. Yet a few minutes/pages later, in scene twenty three, during an interview conducted three years after this presentation, that is in 2006, a journalist corners Powell, reminding him of his previous remarks. Powell's explanation of his dilemma proves that performativity of knowledge causes historical facts to be manipulated and distorted from the perspective of present conditions. To buy in more and more supporters for the pro-war arguments, the state institutions produce

or twist facts. Once the knowledge is no longer useful, just like Powell, they are abandoned.

Similar to Powell; Wolfowitz, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Bush, and Blair are confronted with tough questions at the end of *Stuff Happens* concerning their statements prior to the war. The configuration of the dialogue is reminiscent of a court scene where the suspects are faced with their crimes. Nonetheless, there is no final verdict after this trial in the play. Excluding Bush, who is portrayed to be uncompromising about his decisions, the other characters falter in the face of these questions.

This ending built up by Hare is a part of the deconstruction of the metanarratives utilised by Bush and his committee. The decisions of people, as the source of truth, are expected to bring progress and justice, and the leaders of society are expected to reflect these true decisions in their politics. Obviously, the ending of the play underlines that neither the politicians nor the people can be the ultimate source of truth. *Stuff Happens*, just like Lyotard, therefore, can be positioned against humanist ideology. Blair's silence epitomises the unreliability of elected politicians and their electors. It becomes obvious that the people's consent does not necessarily lead them to progress or bring them freedom, but it can bring destruction and death. The prescriptive utterances made about Iraq and people's support for the politicians have serious consequences for the people living in Iraq. The moral judgement of the West or Western politicians does not concur with the reality of the invaded country.

The confessions the characters make reveal what metanarratives do not know but they, only for the time being, legitimate the evidence. Once they comply with the metanarratives of the age, the realities are aired on mainstream media, reaching millions of people. Nevertheless, they are discarded from historical metanarratives when they no longer serve the prescriptions of the grand heroes. *Stuff Happens* itself is a confrontation with the diversity and relativity of truth in the postmodern era, laid out for the reader/audience. The play selects a controversial historical moment to exhibit how historical reality is constructed by the metanarratives in modern historiography. The grand heroes of modern history attempt to give a specific meaning to historical reality. Such a traditional construction of history itself relies upon the metanarratives Bush represents in *Stuff Happens*. For this view, historical reality is based on a causal determinism and the Iraq War is a result of terrorist attacks on the WTC on 9/11. In addition, it is the historical task of the "civilised" US and Britain to have recourse to military intervention to save the Iraqis from the dictator

Hussein. However, through the techniques of docudrama, verbatim and epic theatre, the representation of history in *Stuff Happens* punctures these metanarratives, constructing a universal history, and puts an emphasis on the different language games that generate the different realities of histories. Opening the backstage of the political theatre to the cameras, the play manipulates the human and the fallible side of the grand heroes. Moreover, embedding the minor or marginalised (Palestinian, Iraqi and British) voices near to the strident metanarratives, it disturbs the alleged consistency of them.

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