85. The Problematic Criticism of the Post-Truth Pro-Iraq War Discourse in Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*[1]

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Abstract

Changing parameters in people's perception of truth have taken on a different dimension, especially in the last century. The consideration of a person's emotional connection to an idea, instead of objective truths, in accepting an opinion as true has led to the emergence of the concept of post-truth. Before and during the 2003 Iraq War, politicians, opinion leaders, civilians and state institutions tried to guide people through emotional manipulation through post-truth discourses. In the field of art, this situation is criticized in the plays written about the war. For instance, Gregory Burke exposes the post-truth discourse of the military institution in his play *Black Watch*. The historical and contemporary figures he creates in the play mislead soldiers by talking about the virtue of fighting. The discourses they use for this purpose are generally shaped around dreams of heroism, fame, wealth and charisma. They persuade people to fight by making ostentatious promises, but the only things war brings are death and psychological destruction. Burke vividly depicts the dangers the soldiers face in Iraq and the disappointments they experience upon returning home. However, he also criticizes the military institution for its pro-war post-truth narratives by utilizing a post-truth discourse himself. Since he takes an anti-war stance, he is not objective in his depictions and narratives. Due to this contradiction, the playwright's criticism has a self-contradictory structure. Based on this argument, this article first analyses how the post-truth discourse of the military institution is revealed in the play, and then how the counter-arguments are similarly imposed by the playwright, and claims that the writer's challenge with post-truth is problematic.

Keywords: Post-truth, Iraq War, Scottish drama, Gregory Burke, *Black Watch*

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Gregory Burke'ün *Black Watch* Oyununda Irak Savaşı Yanlısı Hakikat Sonrası Söylemin Sorunlu Eleştirisi[3]

Öz

İnsanların doğruluk algısında değişen parametreler özellikle son yüzyılda farklı bir boyut kazanmıştır. Bir görüşü doğru olarak kabul etme konusunda objektif gerçekler yerine kişinin o fikirle olan duygusal bağını göz önünde bulundurması hakikat sonrası kavramını ortaya çıkarmıştır. 2003 Irak Savaşı öncesinde ve sırasında, politikacılar, kanaat önderleri, sivil halk ve devlet kurumları tarafından ileri sürülen hakikat sonrası söylemlerde de insanların bu duygu manipülasyonu ile yönlendirilmeye çalışmışlardır. Sanat alanında ise, savaş hakkında yazılan tiyatro oyunlarında bu durumun eleştirildiği gözlemlenmektedir. Örneğin, Gregory Burke, *Black Watch* oyununda askeri kurumun hakikat sonrası söylemlerini göz önüne sermektedir. Oyunda yarattığı tarihsel ve çağdaş figürler savaşmanın erdeminden bahsederek askerleri yanlış yönlendirmektedir. Bunun için kullandıkları söylemler genellikle kahramanlık, şan, zenginlik ve karizma hayalleri etrafında şekillenmektedir. İnsanlara gösterişli vaatlerde bulunarak onları savaşmaya ikna ederler, fakat savaşın getirdiği şeyler yalnızca ölüm ve psikolojik yıkımdır. Burke askerlerin hem Irak'ta karşı karşıya kaldıkları tehlikeleri hem de vatanlarına dönünce yaşadıkları hayal kırıklıklarını canlı bir şekilde resmeder. Fakat savaş yanlısı hakikat sonrası söylemleri nedeniyle eleştirdiği askeri kurumu, kendisi de hakikat sonrası söylemlerden faydalanarak eleştirmektedir. Savaş karşıtı bir tutum takındığı için betimlemelerinde ve söylemlerinde objektif davranmaz. Bu tezat sebebiyle oyun yazarının eleştirisi kendi içinde çelişen bir yapıya sahiptir. Bu görüşten yola çıkarak, bu makale öncelikle oyunda askeri kurumun hakikat sonrası söyleminin nasıl açığa çıkarıldığını, sonra da karşı argümanların oyun yazarı tarafından nasıl aynı biçimde dayatıldığını inceler ve yazarın hakikat sonrası ile mücadelesinin sorunlu olduğunu iddia eder.

Anahtar kelimeler: Hakikat sonrası, Irak Savaşı, İskoç tiyatrosu, Gregory Burke, *Black Watch*

Pro-war discourses in the period leading up to the Iraq War have received considerable criticism due to the misleading information they contained. People were deceived with claims about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, the threat of international terrorism and violations of democracy and human rights. These claims, put forward to seek public support for the war, were presented with misleading information that appealed to people's emotions such as fear, anxiety and stress, rather than being evidenced with objective facts. Therefore, these claims can be regarded as post-truth discourses. In addition to theorists and researchers who explained the issue of post-truth, playwrights who wrote works about the Iraq War also warned the public against the dangers of emotional manipulation in the process. One such writer is Gregory Burke, who depicts the war experiences of Scotland's famous Black

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Watch regiment in his play titled after the same unit. The playwright clearly depicts how the military institution manipulated and persuaded young people to join the war by means of post-truth pro-war narratives. However, while conveying his anti-war messages, he utilizes a counter-post-truth discourse, too. As he benefits from the same strategy that he criticizes, Burke's manner in *Black Watch* is self-contradictory.

The concept of post-truth, theorized in Ralph Keyes's 2004 book *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, explains how lies are presented as truth in modern society. Actually, the term was first used in 1992 by Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich (Word of the Year, 2016, par. 7), but its theorization did not occur until the publication of Keyes's book. In fact, lies have existed in human history for thousands of years, but today they are being tried to be normalized and decriminalized. Keyes explains this situation, saying, "[e]ven though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth" (2004, pp. 12-13). In the information age we live in, both correct and fake information are rapidly spreading. Particularly due to the increase in the number of the means of communication and the widespread use of social media, people are exposed to many personal opinions and subjective truths, which they may find difficult to discern for accuracy. Keyes offers an explanation regarding human nature's tendency to spread such misinformation, stating, "[a]mong strangers and semistrangers, what sociologists call impression management kicks in. Deception is an integral part of that effort. According to students of dishonesty, one of the leading motivations to tell lies, especially about ourselves, is wanting to 'make a good impression'" (2004, pp. 44-45). Apart from the impression individuals try to create about themselves, institutions and authoritative figures may also resort to post-truth for the positive acceptance of decisions regarding the public. Especially in the twenty-first century, it is observed that institutions such as politics, media and the military tend to use post-truth narratives. Political leaders frequently used this method during both the American Presidential Election and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016. This is why the concept of post-truth was chosen as the word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries in 2016. The institution defines the concept as "an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'" (Word of the Year, 2016, par. 2). Unlike Oxford Dictionaries, Keyes does not address the role of emotions in the spread and acceptance of misinformation. Therefore, the definition of the institution makes a significant contribution to the doctrine. The fact that theorists and researchers explaining the concept refer more to Oxford Dictionaries than to Keyes in their works indicates that the institution's definition is widely accepted. For instance, Tuukka Ylä-Anttila describes the concept as follows: "Dramatic populist upheavals are now familiar in most Western democracies. A peculiar point of interest in these developments internationally has been so-called 'post-truth' politics, which allegedly takes an ambivalent relationship to the truth and bases itself on feelings and identity rather than fact" (2018, p. 356). Similarly, Ignas Kalpokas refers to the relationship between emotional affinity and the perception of truth, saying, "post-truth does signal something that is both 'post' and a return, a re-legitimation of arguments based on their emotional appeal and symbolic value and subjective rather than impersonal truth" (2019, p. 2).

Although the theorization of the concept dates back to 2004, post-truth discourses were already in use in the context of the Iraq War, which began a year earlier. In order to justify the war, which many considered unnecessary, the authorities provided misleading information to the public on issues such as the dangerous situation in Iraq, tyranny of Saddam Hussein, Al-Qaeda, religious extremism and the

global terrorist threat. The most obvious examples were the claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and was harboring Al-Qaeda terrorists. World societies, frightened by the 9/11 attacks, were manipulated to accept in advance the idea that Al-Qaeda could be a threat to them, too. Similarly, the media and politicians were imposing on the public the idea that Saddam Hussein possessed WMDs, and people, already in fear, were further scared into believing this claim. The American President at the time, George W. Bush, furthered his propaganda by stating, "[e]very nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. He showed this by saying either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Address, 2001, par. 30), aiming to gather sympathy from the international community. Then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, also supported Bush's calls for war against Iraq and tried to convince the British public. However, despite all the pro-war propaganda, only 32% of the British population approved of the war in 2002 (Betts and Phythian, 2020, p. 90). Consequently, on 15 February 2003, a large-scale march protested the war. Nevertheless, despite all this opposition, British forces launched Operation Telic in Basra in 2003.

Prominent British playwrights also reacted to the military operation and protested the war by writing many successful works in a very short time. *The Madness of George Dubya* (2003) by Justin Butcher, *Iraq.doc* (2003) by Caryl Churchill, *Advice to Iraqi Women* (2003) by Martin Crimp, *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry* (2003) by Richard Norton-Taylor, *Stuff Happens* (2004) by David Hare, *The Pull of Negative Gravity* (2004) by Jonathan Lichtenstein, *Black Watch* (2006) by Gregory Burke, *How Many Miles to Basra?* (2006) by Colin Teevan, *Days of Significance* (2007) by Roy Williams, *The Vertical Hour* (2008) by David Hare are only a selection of those anti-war works. Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*, analyzed in this article, has achieved a place among the canonical works of the Scottish national theatre. The play depicts the experiences of soldiers who were sent to the Iraq War and regret being deceived by the military institution through post-truth discourses.

Born and raised in Fife, Scotland, where the Black Watch regiment recruited a large number of soldiers, Gregory Burke had the opportunity to closely observe the experiences of soldiers and their families. Regarding this, Milena Kaličanin states, "[b]orn in 1968 into a Fife family that had already experienced continuous recruitment of its men into the British armed services, Gregory Burke was a perfect candidate for writing a story of the Black Watch regiment" (2016, pp. 304-305). Through his personal acquaintance with soldiers and military candidates, Burke acknowledged their mentalities and motivations, enabling him to present successful portrayals and messages in his play. The play was commissioned by Vicky Featherstone, the "founding artistic director of the brand-new National Theatre of Scotland, the brainchild of the Scottish government's National Cultural Strategy" (C. Robinson, 2013, p. 11). As it was written for performance in the National Theatre, the play naturally contains national symbols and a nationalist mindset, and portrays the experiences of soldiers from the legendary Black Watch regiment, a source of pride for Scotland. Upon being commissioned by Featherstone, Burke sought out veterans who had served in the war and conducted interviews with them. The play that emerged as a product of these conversations, has won four Olivier Awards thanks to its narrative, stage effects and the talent of its director, being at that time "the most Olivier awards for an individual production, including best new play and, for John Tiffany, best director" (Brown, 2009, par. 2). Furthermore, due to its strong anti-war messages, the play gained significant attention and was invited by Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond for a special performance at the opening session of the Scottish Parliament in 2007 (Jack, 2008, par. 1; Oliver and Walmsley, 2011, p. 97; R. Robinson, 2012, p. 393; Watson, 2014, p. 227).

The play criticizes the post-truth pro-war discourse of the military institution commanded by the UK government, questioning the necessity of the Iraq War. It consists of scenes depicting a writer interviewing returning soldiers in a pub and scenes portraying the same soldiers' memoirs in Iraq. In the very first scene, the play conveys the message that true information can be learned not through listening to narratives, but by witnessing events first-hand:

> **Cammy** What day you want tay know?
>
> **Writer** What it was like in Iraq.
>
> **Cammy** What it was fucking like?
>
> **Stewarty** Go tay fucking Baghdad if you want tay ken what it's like. (Burke, 2008, p. 7)

Burke's critique of post-truth is presented at the very beginning. Before joining the war, individuals are promised glory, world peace and democracy with fancy words, but indeed, what the war brings is death and psychological devastation. Therefore, with the aim of revealing the real facts, Burke "found himself on an artistic quest to recreate the raw truth of the Black Watch regiment, without any attempts at softening or beautifying its burdensome bits and pieces" (Kaličanin, 2016, p. 308). To achieve this aim, Burke cannot physically take his readers/audience to Baghdad, as Stewart suggests, but he brings the war to the stage using elements of verbatim theatre. In this regard, the play uses music and sound design to create an immersive emotional experience for the audience. The musicality helps to set the mood and create an emotional atmosphere through military music and soldiers' songs. The play begins with a tattoo music with bagpipe and drums that reaches a climax before the Voice-Over is heard, which forces the audience to be possessed by the military ambiance.

Burke's criticism of the military institution's use of a post-truth discourse can be classified into several points of discussion. The main ones can be categorized as the institution's exploitation of Iraq, its exploitation of individual soldiers, the deception of soldiers, and finally the deception of the entire British society through the media. Based on the depiction of the institution's actions and discourses, it is possible to infer that the playwright takes an opposing stance against the war. The main argument of the government and the Ministry of Defence was that Iraq had the potential to use weapons of mass destruction and was aiding and abetting terrorists. Burke, who opposes these claims, reflects Operation Telic as a theatre, not as a defensive operation in the play:

> **Rossco** It's the importance ay having a piece ay paper in your hand.
>
> **Cammy** Very important.
>
> **Fraz** You should always carry a piece ay paper way you.
>
> **Cammy** It's fucking crucial tay survival in the modern theatre ay operations. (Burke, 2008, p. 15)

In the play, neither Saddam, nor Al-Qaeda, nor any weapons of mass destruction are mentioned. The individual characters representing the military institution also do not use expressions that justify the war. Thus, Burke only criticizes the institution's discourse, not that of individual soldiers. In this regard, his play seems to be aiming to "chang[e] people's views by critiquing the whole premise and operation of the Iraq War" (Oliver and Walmsley, 2011, p. 97). Therefore, it can be argued that, according to Burke, it is the Ministry of Defence that cannot direct this "theatre" as professionally as it should.

Burke also portrays the military institution as a colonial structure. The institution exploits both Iraq (and Iraqi people) and its own members from the lowest to higher ranks in the military hierarchy. In relation to the exploitation of Iraq, İmren Yelmiş puts forward that "[t]he Black Watch or Western

countries like the UK and the USA have started where Lawrence had left off, and that they are continuing Lawrence's imperial mission once again given to them by the U.K. administration" (2016, p. 492). The British army, and therefore the Black Watch within it, was sent back to Mesopotamia a century later by policy-makers with post-truth arguments. This deployment seems to be a part of an imperial mission. However, while there is a reference in the play to Thomas Edward Lawrence visiting the same region as Yelmiş relates, Burke does not imply that the Black Watch was an active part of such a mission. The dialogue referring to Lawrence's being in the same region goes as follows:

> **Cammy** [...] He was here, you know?
>
> **Fraz** Lawrence ay Arabia?
>
> **Cammy** Right fucking here.
>
> **Fraz** (*looks around*) Lucky bastard ay.
>
> **Cammy** Aye.
>
> **Fraz** And what did he do, when he was here?
>
> **Cammy** What did he do?
>
> **Fraz** Aye. What's it about?
>
> **Cammy** It's ... eh, well, he kinday ...
>
> **Fraz** You dinnay ken what it's about? (Burke, 2008, p. 13)

As seen in the dialogue, the soldiers are unaware of what activities Lawrence carried out in Mesopotamia. Cammy, who has read part of Lawrence's book *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and lost half of it, is not interested in either espionage or international relations. Since half of the book is missing, Fraz and calls the book the "*Three and a Half Pillars ay Wisdom*" (Burke, 2008, p. 14) and thus mocks the spy and his imperial mission.

For Burke, the biggest target of exploitation by the military institution apart from Iraq is the unemployed Scottish youth, and this exploitation is clearly expressed in the play. In the play's opening monologue, Cammy declares that "[t]hey poor fucking boys. They cannay day anything else. They cannay get a job. They get exploited by the army" (Burke, 2008, p. 4). Young people who see serving in the army as a job opportunity are easily hunted by the army. The one who recruits them in the play is Lord Elgin, another Scottish figure who has become the Anglicized spokesperson of the British military institution. As Kieran Hurley notes, "[w]e see the exploitation of generations of young working-class men seduced by the army's false promises, through the appearance of the character of Lord Elgin" (2008, p. 275). Lord Elgin is a very interesting character in that he shares the same discourse as the UK government and the Ministry of Defence. He, too, was recruited and exploited by the military at an early age, but he has internalized this exploitation and become an agent of the military institution. Unaware of the social status of the Scottish youth, Elgin speaks with a flawless London accent as soon as he appears on stage. However, since he acts like an upper-class English person, he cannot convince the working-class Scottish youth of recruitment. During his attempts to persuade them, he asks them where they work, and upon receiving the answer "[t]he pit" (Burke, 2008, p. 27), he realizes that they are from the working class and asks in a Scottish accent, "[a]nd you dinnay want tay join the army?" (Burke, 2008, p. 27) in an attempt to act like one of them. As a consequence, he exploits not only the bodies and minds of the characters, but also their identities.

Lord Elgin recounts how he joined the army at a young age through the Scottish folk song titled "The Forfar Sodger." The narrator in the song is born in Forfar as the child of a very poor family. Following

the common practice, he attends school for secular education and the Kirk for religious education, but he becomes inspired with a different idea:

> Fan I was six I gaed tae school
> Because it wis the fashion
> An ilka Sunday tae the kirk
> Tae save me o' a thrashin.
> [...]
> They learntit me tae read an write
> An coont the rule o' three, sir
> But a nobler thocht cam tae ma heid
> An a sodger I wid be, sir. (Burke, 2008, p. 29)

Serving in the army was seen as a nobler thought than receiving an education or practicing a religious faith in the time of Lord Elgin, as it is today. Therefore, it is seen that post-truth statements were used for greater recruitment during that time, as well. In the continuation of the song, Elgin expresses how the institution treated and supported him as follows:

> They gied me claes tae hep ma back
> An mittens tae ma hands, sir
> An swore I wis the brawest cheil
> In a' the Heilan clans, sir. (Burke, 2008, p. 30)

The presentation of Elgin as "the bravest child in all the Highland clans" serves as evidence of the institution's post-truth discourse, akin to the Golden Thread myth, being both old and traditional, as the British army continues to encounter such displays of encouragement. However, this ballad is not limited to just the part told by Lord Elgin. In the continuation of the original folk song, the narrator who becomes a soldier is later sent to fight in Spain and becomes a lame after being shot in the leg and lives in Forfar. Elgin may be deliberately omitting this part in order not to discourage the soldiers.

The military institution not only exploits the bodies and identities of its soldiers, but also plays with their emotions. Burke illustrates various manipulation techniques used by the army in the play, revealing how they utilize a post-truth discourse. Perhaps the scene where manipulation techniques are used most diversely is the scene in which Lord Elgin, who represents the institution, enters the pub. While the ex-soldiers are giving an interview to the Writer in the pub, when the subject comes to the recruitment for the First World War, Lord Elgin suddenly appears and the scene turns into the moment when the ex-soldiers are recruited. Holding the sword of the famous Scottish leader Robert the Bruce, Elgin claims that the Scottish King "led his men at Bannockbum and is buried nearby at Dunfermline Abbey. He led his men in a fight for freedom from the tyranny of a foreign power and the need then, as now, for Scotsmen to serve their country in its hour of need is as great" (Burke, 2008, pp. 25-26). In fact, Robert the Bruce fought against the English to gain his country's independence, and his sword "symbolises his historic deeds throughout the efforts to gain independence for Scotland against England and his success and heroism in doing this at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, all of which are used to call the Black Watch soldiers to the Iraq War" (Yelmiş, 2016, p. 495). In other words, Lord Elgin is not calling on young Scots to fight to liberate their country from an invading power, but to wage war on

another independent country. But, since he cannot manifest this fact directly, he must manipulate them with post-truth statements.

Political and military authorities tried to justify the intervention in Iraq by appealing to both negative emotions such as fear and anxiety and positive emotions such as hope, patriotism and heroism. Similarly, Lord Elgin strives to stimulate first the negative and then the positive emotions of the people in the pub. When the unconvinced soldiers demand payment for joining the army, Elgin attempts to intimidate them with xenophobic imaginations:

> **Granty** We're still wanting fucking paid.
>
> **Lord Elgin** Paid?
>
> *Beat*.
>
> Fucking paid?
>
> *Beat*.
>
> Our country faces the gravest peril, the Hun threatens our very civilisation.
>
> *Beat*.
>
> D'you think you'll be getting fucking paid when the Kaiser bowls up the road and takes over? (Burke, 2008, p. 27)

When Granty responds, "[m]aybe" (Burke, 2008, p. 27), Elgin realizes that his false threats do not work. Nonetheless, the truth he needs to convince them of is pretty clear: it is necessary and enjoyable to join the army and fight the enemy. When Elgin figures out that the financial status of the young men is not very pleasant, he begins to promise them things they can hardly dream of to convince them. He starts with travel to France (Burke, 2008, p. 27) and then, as a result of the demands from the young men for more, he promises them plenty of meals, football, guns, drinks and exotic sexual experiences (Burke, 2008, p. 28). Yet, these promises alone are not enough to convince them. These young men, who, due to their financial needs, are thought to be satisfied only with material prizes, surprise Lord Elgin. Rather than material gains, they desire a pleasure that will gratify their souls:

> **Cammy** What about glory?
>
> **Lord Elgin** Glory?
>
> **Cammy** Aye?
>
> **Lord Elgin** Oh aye … aye … the glory.
>
> *Beat*.
>
> The glory of returning, at Christmas, a hero. (Burke, 2008, p. 28)

It can be inferred from his hesitation and pause here that Lord Elgin has never considered the issue of glory previously. As a result, even he does not seem to believe it himself when he announces that they will obtain glory and return home as heroes. While interviewing the men in the local Fife pub, Burke realized that, rather than the political issues about the causes and progress of the war and its futility, the ex-soldiers are concerned about "the lack of glory upon their return home, the betrayal of 'the golden thread', the promise of glory and tradition, a 'lie' repeated throughout history that Burke was familiar with growing up near Dunfermline, an area with a high recruitment rate" (Beck, 2013, p. 133). The glory that the young men value above all else is nothing more than a false promise given by the military institution as a part of their post-truth discourse.

In addition to Lord Elgin, another character who possesses a similar post-truth discourse is the Sergeant. While Lord Elgin strives for recruitment at homeland, the Sergeant is with the soldiers on the battlefield, trying to keep their enthusiasm alive. Similar to Lord Elgin's words, he also promises that the soldiers will be granted sexual experience. However, while Elgin claims that soldiers will receive their reward when they leave the country with the army, the Sergeant states that they will receive it upon completing their tasks and returning to the homeland:

> **Sergeant** […] Have you even telt him how much fucking fanny he's gonnay get when he gets home? Have they telt you?
>
> **Kenzie** No yet, Sergeant.
>
> **Sergeant** Fucking war heroes, you boys. Who the fuck gets tay say that any more? Million quid? (Burke, 2008, p. 18)

The morale of the soldiers, who do not encounter any situation in the name of the military service they imagined at Camp Dogwood, deteriorates significantly with the final suicide attack. The responsibility of keeping high the morale of soldiers, who no longer have any enthusiasm for staying in the army, and preventing them from leaving falls on the Officer this time. Like Lord Elgin and the Sergeant, he also tries to speak of a word that will boost Cammy's pride: "You're going to get stuck up for a medal for that today. You're the type of man this regiment needs, Campbell" (Burke, 2008, p. 69). After all the attempts by the representatives of the military authority prove unsuccessful, Cammy asks the Officer why he still stays in the army. Even though the Officer realizes that the soldiers can no longer be deceived by any false promises, he does not completely abandon his discourse and once again highlights the Golden Thread myth:

> **Officer** Some of us … It's in the blood.
>
> *Beat*.
>
> And I always thought … well, it's not like any other job, is it?
>
> *Beat*.
>
> It's part of who we are, where we come from. It's the reason you join up in the first place. The Golden Thread. (Burke, 2008, pp. 70-71)

It can be inferred from the presence of the surviving soldiers in the more recent pub scenes that the Officer's final attempt fails, as well.

The military institution aims to deceive not only individual soldiers but also the entire British society through its post-truth discourse, using the media as a tool. In the play, this pursuit is portrayed in the scene where journalists visit Camp Dogwood to film the soldiers for the evening news. The reporter seems to be sent by the military authorities to restore the tarnished reputation of the institution. As part of the military hierarchy, the Sergeant also says, regarding the propaganda shoot, that "[t]his war's unpopular efuckinough wayout that. (*To Cammy*.) Just smile and reassure the great British public that you are happy in your job" (Burke, 2008, p. 36). Frustrated with all this deception and propaganda, Cammy, when asked about the controversies surrounding the deployment, tries to enlighten the public with all honesty and bring the truth to light, saying, "[i]t's a buzz, you're in a war ay, but you're no really doing the job you're trained for but it's no like they're a massive threat tay you or tay your country, you're no defending your country. We're invading their country and fucking their day up" (Burke, 2008, p. 38). Yet, since these statements are in conflict with the official discourse, the journalists collaborating with the authorities discard this footage and prefer to re-shoot it. At that moment, several explosions occur

and, taking advantage of the chaos, Fraz gets in front of the camera and starts talking about irrelevant matters, so the British society cannot learn the unfiltered truths.

From all the analysis and exemplification above, it is clear that Burke is immensely critical of the post-truth discourse of the military institution. He describes in many scenes how the institution deceives the soldiers and the civilian population by lying to them and appealing to their emotions, and by making propaganda. However, it is quite ironic that even though Burke challenges the post-truth discourse of the military institution, he himself prefers to use a counter-post-truth discourse instead of presenting only objective truths to the reader/audience. Similarly, on the playwright's strategy of presenting the truth, Janine Hauthal says, "combining (auto-)biography and historiography, the play's documentary approach makes both objective and subjective truth claims" (2013, p. 163). Maybe Burke makes such a choice because he desires for the claims made by soldiers, rather than those made by the institution, to be accepted as true by the public and to leave a deeper impact. He may also be aiming for these individuals to be immortalized for all their effort, rather than being lost to history in military reports or news articles. Even a dialogue between Fraz and Cammy hints such an intention, reading,

> **Fraz** Do you think they'll make a film about this war?
>
> **Cammy** They fucking better. I didnay fucking join the army for it no tay get immortalised on the big fucking screen. (Burke, 2008, p. 14)

With *Black Watch*, Burke does not immortalize the soldiers through a film, but rather, through a play. However, in doing so, he also imposes his own anti-Iraq War ideology.

In the play, there is little or no description that can be considered negative about the soldiers, except for their undisciplined behavior. Yet, it is implied that soldiers are often portrayed negatively in other media, particularly by journalists. In the last pub scene, when the Writer asks the soldiers how many people they killed in Iraq, Stewarty suddenly becomes quite irritated:

> **Stewarty** This cunt wants tay make a name for himself by telling every cunt
>
> how we're all a fucking shower ay cunts.
>
> […]
>
> That's how these cunts day it though ay?
>
> *Beat.*
>
> They're only fucking interested if they think they're gonnay get some fucking dirt on you.
>
> **Cammy** Well, that's what the public want ay?
>
> **Writer** Usually. (Burke, 2008, p. 60)

The crimes committed during the Iraq war, such as torture, civilian killings, looting, and so on, were heavily criticized after the early stages of the war. In the United Kingdom and the United States, many soldiers were tried for these accusations, providing the news media with a very useful content. In the play, Burke already makes very careful choices in order to avoid similar and possible defamations. Furthermore, he seems to be taking it upon himself to clean up this "dirt" because the soldiers are not promising enough in cleaning it themselves, as their own voices are not strong or convincing enough to impress people. Regarding the soldiers' inadequacy to express themselves, Burke states, "I think that's what made the play ['Black Watch'] successful, to tell you the truth. Working-class people are inarticulate when you ask them about momentous experiences. They don't tell you those emotional things, the big kind of things. They'll tell a great vivid story, but almost in a rehearsed, practiced way"

(qtd. in Pressley, 2011, par. 15). As an accomplished playwright, Burke is able to utilize post-truth in order to make a striking impression on people. Thus, it seems that another reason for Burke's intentionally adopting an emotionally-charged discourse is to fulfil the need for the neglected sympathy for the individual soldiers.

When problems concerning the entire country arise, grand narratives such as nationalist ideologies aim to put aside people's personal concerns and address the nation as a whole. An example of this instilment can be seen during war times, where public opinion is shaped around inclusive phenomena such as country, nation, army, and so on by governments. Therefore, during such times of crisis, individuals may be viewed as insignificant details, as the interests of the country are prioritized over personal interests and above all else. It is usually expected to make personal sacrifices for the welfare of the homeland and nation during nationwide crises. In the case of the Iraq War, realizing that the self-sacrifice of individuals remains unnoticed, Burke, through *Black Watch*, aims to evoke sympathy towards those individuals and establish empathy with them. In relation to this intention, Lindsay B. Cummings states that "[t]his play, based on interviews with former Black Watch members, promises a kind of intimacy and access not available through more 'impersonal' media accounts. In other words, it promises an opportunity to empathize" (2011, p. 78). When one of the soldiers Burke had interviewed watched a performance of the play, "he said, 'I didn't think anybody cared about us. About me.' [...] That's why it affected him cause he just thought, you know, this is about me, and my pals. And it was just that kind of thing, he felt that someone was acknowledging his life" (Burke qtd. in Beck, 2013, p. 147). Considering the soldier's remark, it can be safely claimed that Burke is not the only one to enjoy the public interest in the soldiers' ordeal in Iraq.

In the play, the Writer, who is positioned as an outsider through his clothing, stance, approach to soldiers and London accent, lacks empathy towards the ex-soldiers. Like the ordinary reader/audience, he is unable to grasp what they experienced and felt in Iraq. Frustrated by the Writer's lack of empathy, Stewarty reproaches him –and indeed anyone who does not share the same experiences as the soldiers but speaks authoritatively about them– with the following questioning:

> **Writer** What was it like getting fired at?
>
> **Cammy** It's weird ay.
>
> **Stewarty** It fucks people up. Big time.
>
> *Beat*.
>
> Rips them apart.
>
> *Beat*.
>
> You seen the size ay the bullets we use in a chain gun?
>
> *Beat*.
>
> You seen what happens when a bullet that size hits somebody?
>
> **Writer** Well ... no ... I haven't.
>
> **Stewarty** So how the fuck are you gonnay explain it tay folk, then? (Burke, 2008, p. 59)

Stewarty's rhetorical question addresses anyone who has a word to say about a war. One should choose their discourse carefully, which they use to convince others of the correctness of an opinion or fact. As theorists of post-truth explain, rational explanations are not as effective in moving the masses as emotional engagement. For example, a suicide attack may be a fleeting event and may not have profound impacts on people when it occurs far away. However, Burke and the NTS team, through *Black Watch*,

not only visualize the attack that happened in Iraq, but also use slow-motion technique to prolong the sensation of victimization, making it even more impactful. With regards to the team's choreography to embrace the audience viscerally, Hauthal argues,

> The choreographies' 'corpo-reality' facilitates realist effects which depend both on the actors' emotional and physical investment in portraying characters from 'real life' as well as on the audience's somatic empathy and emotional engagement with the performance. This strategy is most palpable in the image of regimental community and *esprit de corps* in the final scene. Here, the actors' physical exhaustion after the climactic suspension of the music puts their physical investment on display and strongly encourages emotional contagion. (2013, p. 171)

Burke and the NTS aim to pull the reader/audience further into the play in order to create a perception of reality in them. The strategy mentioned in the Officer's first email seems to indicative of the objective of the creative team, which reads, "[o]ur orders are to apply our own tactics and, in contrast to the 'firepower and force protection first' style of the Americans, get out among the local population and win hearts and minds" (Burke, 2008, p. 12). If it is assumed that Burke intends to break with theatrical conventions, then the letter can also be interpreted as follows: just as commanders order the Officer to win the hearts of people, Burke also wants the actors to win over the reader/audience.

As Hauthal comments above, the reader/audience is not only won over by the characters' speeches, but also through theatricality, both rationally and viscerally. In this respect, besides the choreography, also musical instruments are used to impress the audience: "As the pipes and drums are used to raise the hairs on the backs of the necks of young men and women preparing for battle, so in *Black Watch*, the pipes and drums combined encourage the audience to switch off intellectually and go 'over the top' in solidarity with 'our boys', and in celebration of the Black Watch" (Archibald, 2008, p. 12). As a result of the emotional enlistment caused by the bagpipe and drum music, the audience feels an affinity towards the soldiers. If this affinity is further supported by physicality, the audience may feel as if they were one of the soldiers. In such a scenario, the effect of the following scene is likely to be much stronger:

> **Cammy** That's what we joined the army tay day.
>
> **Rossco** Fight.
>
> **Cammy** No for our government.
>
> **Macca** No for Britain.
>
> **Nabsy** No even for Scotland.
>
> **Cammy** I fought for my regiment.
>
> **Rossco** I fought for my company.
>
> **Granty** I fought for my platoon.
>
> **Nabsy** I fought for my section.
>
> **Stewarty** I fought for my mates. (Burke, 2008, p. 72)

All this emotional intensity caused by Burke's post-truth narrative is an obstacle to rational thinking. Under the influence of this psychological state, the audience is inclined to accept as true not the official statements of the military institution, even if they reflect the truth, but the statements of the characters with whom they feel closer.

Ordinary audience members and columnists have often expressed the feelings that the play aroused in them and how they were captured by the narrative. For example, on the audience reactions, James Oliver and Ben Walmsley report, "audience members consistently reported feelings of pleasure and

captivation, employing adjectives such as 'magnificent', 'fantastic', 'moving' and 'intense', while critics found it 'thrilling', 'spectacular' and 'compelling'. Many spectators spontaneously communicated their increased understanding of and empathy with the soldiers, whether physically (by laughing and crying) or verbally" (2011, p. 97). To exemplify more specifically, Ben Brantley, the former chief theatre critic of *The New York Times*, notes, "[e]very moment in 'Black Watch' seems to bleed from the previous one in an uninterrupted river of sensations" (2007, par. 11), and adds that "[i]n the final marching sequence, as the men moved forward and stumbled in shifting patterns, I found to my surprise that I was crying" (2007, par. 15). It is a frequently reported situation that audience members fall into crying as a result of dramatic purgation and emotional outbursts. This immersive effect on people demonstrates both the playwright's and the creative team's theatrical and manipulative abilities. Aware of his talent and its accompanying success, saying, "[t]here seem to be two different audiences for the play. Those who are thrilled by the theatricality of the play and show their appreciation immediately and the people who take a little bit of time to give you a reaction, particularly if they've been crying" (qtd. in Pattie, 2011, p. 32), Burke boasts about the audience's such reactions. So, it can be deduced from these accounts that utilizing post-truth in *Black Watch* has brought Burke success and international recognition.

In conclusion, post-truth is a highly controversial communication method from an ethical standpoint as it manipulates people's emotions and prevents them from reaching the truth through rational thinking. In *Black Watch*, Burke criticizes the post-truth discourse used by the military institution to mislead people before and during the Iraq War. According to the playwright, the military institution tells lies or tries to create the perception of truth in people by appealing to their emotions, both for the purpose of exploitation and deception of individuals. Rather than informing people with facts related to the Operation Telic carried out in Iraq and convincing them with reasonable arguments, the institution highlights the assumption that the war will bring heroism and glory. The playwright criticizes how individuals are deceived by these statements and recruited into the army. However, ironically, Burke draws on the post-truth he criticizes in presenting his counter argument.

The authority of the playwrights comes not only from their ability to create interesting works of art, but also from their willingness to engage in politics. In play texts or stages, the monopoly of conveying a message, refuting opposing views, informing people, deceiving or persuading the reader/audience is entirely in the hands of the playwright. Due to this authority, in plays dealing with political issues, the side of the playwright is also in a position of strength. Therefore, the role of the playwright becomes even more critical. They encourage – or even force – the reader/audience to question the discourses presented by those in power in the political arena and to recognize the potential for manipulation in their rhetoric. Burke, in this respect, engages in a power struggle against the military institution by means of *Black Watch*. He implies that he warns the reader/audience against the manipulations of power-holders. However, since those power-holders and their discourses are also the product of the playwright's own imagination, the real authority that needs to be criticized is the playwright himself.

The controversial situation mentioned above raises difficult questions about the role of the artist in the world of the post-truth era. Should artists merely reflect the behavioral patterns of society and individuals? Or do they have a duty to stick to certain standards of truth and objectivity, even at the risk of diminishing the emotional impact of their work? Plays are means of expression for the ethical choices of the playwrights regarding their attitudes towards war. In a world where post-truth discourses are frequently used to manipulate the mindset of the public, especially on sensitive issues like war, the ethical responsibilities of playwrights in trying to influence the public are an important topic of debate. Of course, playwrights are free to perform their art, determine the content and messages of their plays,

and decide on their discourses. However, trying to impose personal views through post-truth as if conveying the truth is quite problematic. Therefore, the employment of post-truth discourse by Burke requires a thorough scrutiny of the ethical limits of artistic expression. His reliance on emotional appeal to challenge a perspective on the war presents an ethical dilemma: Does the end justify the means? Is it acceptable to adopt the very post-truth strategies and techniques to reveal the mechanisms of institutional deception and manipulation? This contradiction – the simultaneous condemnation and utilization of post-truth – places the ethical burden and responsibility on the playwrights, which is why Burke, rather than the military institution, is criticized in this article.

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