



Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi,
The Journal of Social Sciences Institute
Sayı/Issue: 40 – Sayfa / Page: 41-50
ISSN: 1302-6879 VAN/TURKEY

Makale Bilgisi / Article Info
Geliş/Received: 19.04.2018 Kabul/Accepted: 23.05.2018

**CHILCOT RAPORU VE *STUFF HAPPENS* ESERİNDE
"TARİHİN METİNSELLİĞİ VE METNİN TARİHSELLİĞİ"**

**'TEXTUALITY OF HISTORY AND HISTORICITY OF TEXT'
THROUGH THE CHILCOT REPORT AND *STUFF HAPPENS***

Doç. Dr. Aydın GÖRMEZ
Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi
Edebiyat Fakültesi
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
aydingormez@hotmail.com

Fatma KARAMAN
Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ABD
Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi
karaman.fatma@hotmail.com

Öz

2003 yılında başlayan ve 2011 yılına dek süren ve etkileri hala devam eden Irak savaşından sonra, devletin üst kademelerinde bulunmuş olan Sir John Anthony Chilcot tarafından 2009-2016 yılları arasında Irak Soruşturması olarak da bilinen Chilcot Raporu adı altında geniş bir araştırma yürütülmüştür. Bu rapor Birleşik Krallığın Irak savaşında yer almasının sebeplerini ve sonuçlarını, savaşın gerçek ve acı yüzünü, ayrıca hükümetin bu kararının birçok farklı yönünü ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Öte taraftan ünlü İngiliz oyun yazarı David Hare *Stuff Happens* adlı bir oyun yazarak bu tarihi olayı odağa alır, bu savaş ile ilgili önemli ancak çok bilinmeyen noktalara işaret eder ve İngiltere ile Amerika'yı eleştirir. Bu açıdan, Chilcot Raporu savaşın değerlendirildiği kurgusal olmayan yazın türü olarak ele alınabilecek iken *Stuff Happens* kurgusal bir eser olarak nitelendirilebilir. Bu makalenin amacı bu iki metni tarihselci bir bakış açısı ile ele alarak Yeni Tarihselcilik kuramını ortaya atan Stephen Greenblatt tarafından kavramsallaştırılmış olan "tarihin metinselliği ve metnin tarihselliği" çerçevesinde değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Tarihselcilik, Irak Savaşı, Metin, Chilcot Raporu, *Stuff Happens*.

Abstract

After the Iraq war that began in 2003 and lasted until 2011 but the influences of which still continues, an extensive research was done by Sir John Chilcot, one of the former statesmen, between 2009 and 2016 under the name of Chilcot Report which is also known as the Iraq Inquiry. This report aims to put forward and reveal the reasons of the participation of United Kingdom in the Iraq war, its consequences, the real and severe face of the war and many other sides of the decision of the government. Likewise, a well-known English playwright David Hare stages *Stuff Happens*, by which he focuses on the war, points out important yet unknown issues about the event, and criticizes the United Kingdom government and the US. In that respect the Chilcot Report might be handled as a non-fictional text which evaluates the war while *Stuff Happens* as a fictional one. The aim of this paper is to analyse these two texts from a new historicist perspective and asses them within the context of “textuality of history and historicity of the text” conceptualized by Stephen Greenblatt who coined the theory New Historicism.

Keywords: New Historicism, Iraq War, Text, The Chilcot Report, *Stuff Happens*.

Introduction

“The past happened; the historian discovers it and writes it down” (250) Kathleen Weiler states in his article. However, this is a traditional and old approach to the history. New historicism, as a new theory on the interpretation of the text, comes out as a rejection of these old ideas on history and literature. It was theorized by Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, the attempts on the conceptualization of New Historicism have failed because there is not a manifesto-like text of new historicism (Hohendahl, 91). Greenblatt defines it as a “practice” instead of “a unified theory” (qtd. in Iyengar, 900). This new criticism puts forward a critical and historical approach to literature. Obviously, New Historicism rejects to privilege literature over history and it evaluates the text as a whole with co-texts (Iyengar, 900). In fact, New Historians provide a combination of fictional and non-fictional texts in order to be able to interpret the historical events. Stephen Greenblatt defines the text as “the work of art” and the context as the text’s “historical environment” (qtd. In Hohendahl, 92). In that respect, *Stuff Happens*, a historical and a political play, by David Hare will scrutinized. In *Stuff Happens* David Hare criticizes the United Kingdom government, its deeds and the US through verbatim theatre technique. Hare unearths official debates on the decision of the attack on Iraq behind the closed

doors as if he were an audience in these meetings. On the other hand, there is a report of these debates and the military operations of the Iraq War. After the war, an extensive research was conducted by Sir John Chilcot between 2009 and 2016 named Chilcot Report which is also known as the Iraq Inquiry. This report aims to put forward and unfold the reasons of the participation of United Kingdom in the Iraq war, its results, the real and severe face of the war and many other stimuli of the decision of the government. From the point of new historicism, Chilcot Report might be regarded a non-fictional text which evaluates the war while *Stuff Happens* (2004) by David Hare a fictional text. This paper seeks to conduct a research on the meaning of new historicism and its views on official history and literary texts via Chilcot Report and *Stuff Happens*. In addition, they are studied from a new historicist point of view and in terms of “textuality of history and historicity of text” coined by Stephen Greenblatt, one of the pioneers of new historicism.

(Old) Historicism and New-Historicism

Old Historicism was theorized and developed by such famous scholars as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The main idea of Old Historicism comes from the belief that history is the production of the destiny of mankind and the grand-narrative figure, the God (Dean, 262). Accordingly Old Historicism has limitations because there are grand-narratives, facts and truths decided by the powers in societies. Furthermore, Historicism has been defined in several ways and one of the finest one that of Morris R. Cohen: “a faith that history is the main road to wisdom in human affairs” (qtd. in Lee and Beck, 569). As might be deduced from both of these definitions, the main aim is to put the accepted facts on a linear structure. On the other hand, New Historicism denies the idea that a text is a mere and simple reflection. Moreover, the text loses its significance after a while since it is accepted as an entity with all the surroundings, culture, social events, politics, wars and so on. However, it cannot be claimed that there is a clear cut definition of New Historicism for “...the New Historian, typically does not produce a one-dimensional narrative, or even a set of narratives that parallel each other” (Hohendahl, 95-96). It is obvious that New Historicism has formed an important argument with its new approach to a literary text and its criticism (Hohendahl, 102). To illustrate the definition of history and the effects of historian on the historical texts Rousseau states that “the facts described in history never give an exact picture of what actually happened. They change form in the historian’s head. They get molded by his interests and take on the hue of his prejudices” (qtd. in Weiler, 247). Therefore

it is possible to assume that history gives the truth as it is; however, this procedure is not that simple and clear. In fact, a historian relies on some proof, and creates a story which has an influence on the reader who takes it as truth. That does not mean a historian is only a writer or the history is nothing more than an imaginary piece of writing. The reality is that an event occurs in the old times and this event is narrated by an author who is called historian, yet the surroundings and the external influences affecting this narration cannot be underestimated. The subjectivity of the mind and the creativity in the interpretation provides an acceptable explanation of “hi-s-tory”. Indeed, the historian can add and/or eliminate some facts or fictions and specify or extend the limits of the events which affect the factuality of the historical event (Weiler, 252). New historicists believe that it needs to be carved into the minds that “... history is a human creation moulded by the interests and prejudices of the historian...” (Weiler, 247). Therefore, one cannot speak of objectivity because the process begins and ends with the interpretation of the texts surrounded by co-texts.

On Stuff Happens by David Hare

David Hare has a crucial change in his ideology while writing his plays which are created and developed under the boundaries of political theatre. The most important feature behind this change in his writing is his talent of observation through which he becomes a social observer. As an observer he tackles the political issues and their effects on the people; then, he criticizes the government in his plays through the characters, their acts and speeches (Reinelt 303). One of his plays is *Stuff Happens* in which both of the American and British governments have been severely criticized because of their participation in the war in Iraq. In this play Hare applies to verbatim theatre’s elements; for instance, he uses the language to taunt the real speeches of the authorities which are hidden behind closed doors and he makes use of the public records. The authorities can be listed as Tony Blair and George W. Bush who are the main characters of the play, Colin Powell, Condi Rice, Hans Blix and Paul Wolfowitz. Moreover, their conversations in the play are the main objects of the argument of the play. Furthermore, the dullness of the actors, who act as the presidents of two countries, make the spectators laugh while showing them the real aims of the power-holders in the war in Iraq. According to Janelle Reinelt, David Hare uses Colin Powell as a spokesman who tries to show the unfair acts of both of the presidents (305). In addition, it becomes possible to see that the main aim of the presidents is to be the most powerful one by means of Powell’s stance against and

noncommittal speeches. In that respect, it can be claimed that Powell gains sympathy of the audience as a balancing figure on the stage. However, his resistance against the unacceptable steps of American and British governments remains inconclusive. In addition to that Janelle Reinelt declares her ideas on the importance of the writing of the play in these words “*Stuff Happens* creates an extended balancing act of humor and pathos, using epic realism to get at the sociopolitical implications of both events and personalities.” (306). As it is stated, it can be inferred that *Stuff Happens* is a specific example of the union of the verbatim theatre and political theatre. The observer of the social events and the playwright David Hare’s significant political play is praised by Reinelt in these sentences “The play and its production provide a thoughtful, nuanced account of recent history, seen through the lens of a writer who understands the enormity of what has happened.” (306). It can be interpreted that the current events have been examined through a professional observation and this theatrical writing can be accepted as a kind of historical document and also it can be claimed that this play creates an awareness via its strong supporting ideas.

‘Textuality of History and Historicity of Text’ through The Chilcot Report and *Stuff Happens*

The Iraq Inquiry report puts forward a serious survey consisting of the first steps of the United Kingdom in the probability of the war and the drawing back the soldiers from Iraq between 2001 and 2009. This survey is a comprehensive one dealing with almost every part of life in Iraq which has been severely affected by the Iraq war (Chilcot Report 4). In 2003, the Cabinet of the United Kingdom has discussed and decided, only in two days, to join the attack on Iraq. Until 28 June 2004, the United Kingdom army has been a balancing and protecting power in Iraq because after the war a number of problems about the regime and the government has come out. Even today, the results of Iraq war have been seen in Iraq, the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, a huge number of people has been killed, wounded and affected psychologically and physically because of the war. Therefore, whether the war brings happiness or collapses the lives of innocent people remains unanswered. After a dictatorship, these innocent people had some hopes about future but they soon realized that they had to postpone their dreams for some time. Above all, joining a war is a very serious event with its causes and effects. The main reason for the Iraq war was that Iraq secretly manufactured chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and planned to use them against other

countries. Nevertheless, these rumours were seen to be groundless. However during this process on one hand the inhuman regime in Iraq was overthrown but on the other hand all the war caused a destruction of every king and a civil disorder which slowed the economic, political and social upheaval (Chilcot Report 4). Joining the attack should have been the last decision for the United Kingdom and eventually Tony Blair was forced to step aside as prime minister in 2007 in the centre of the criticisms (Cook, 43).

A notice dated 7th of December 2002 was issued by the UN to the Iraq regime before the war, yet the warning had no effect on Saddam Hussein's regime and the war was declared on Iraq in 2003. Almost all details of the military actions were determined by the US army. Tony Blair was seen reluctant to be involved in such a war in which all rules were determined by the US and wanted to give Iraq another chance before the military intervention. Nevertheless, France, Germany and Russia were against a second chance and they were on the side of the US in this point (Chilcot Report 5). As a result there seemed no option for Tony Blair other than involving his country into the war (Chilcot Report 6). Then, this decision rendered him a notorious and a manipulated leadership (Cook 44). On February 2001, another decision was taken as to an attempt was indispensable that not only Iraq but also the Middle East need a change (Chilcot 9). In one of his speeches President Bush reported that "States like these [North Korea, Iran and Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking the weapons of mass destruction these regimes pose a grave and growing danger." (qtd. in Chilcot Report 12). These sentences are nothing more than the self-justification of a President who wanted to control all the resources of the region. In another meeting, on the 5th and 6th of April at Crawford, Tony Blair tried to persuade President Bush turn Saddam Hussein from the idea of production of nuclear weapons (Chilcot Report 13). Backing by the parliament, Tony Blair asked and answered three questions; Why Saddam Hussein? Why at that moment? and Why should the United Kingdom concern about Iraq issue? For the first question Tony Blair expressed that Saddam Hussein has killed a huge number of people who were of his own countrymen and no one could guarantee that he would not use nuclear and chemical weapons on other nations. As an answer for the second question, he continued saying:

I agree I cannot say that this month or next, even this year or next, Saddam will use his weapons. But I can say that if the international community, having made the call for his disarmament, now, at this moment, at

the point of decision, shrugs its shoulders and walks away, he will draw the conclusion dictators faced with a weakening will always draw: that the international community will talk but not act, will use diplomacy but not force. We know, again from our history, that diplomacy not backed by the threat of force has never worked with dictators and never will. (Chilcot Report 18)

It can be inferred from this speech that as a result of Saddam Hussein's deeds, Tony Blair thought that he could use its so called nuclear power against the United Kingdom and this fear explained why the United Kingdom needed to have concerns about Iraq issue.

Tony Blair's misleading decisions in Iraq war are criticized by David Hare, the famous British playwright. Actually, Hare's inspiration of his theatre career is the life itself (Gaston, 214). In an interview he restates that "I believe history has a great effect on who you are and how you think." (Gaston, 217). Moreover, David Hare claims that English theatre needs to handle political issues on the stages (Gaston, 218). And naturally this is the reason why he deals with this Iraq war issue in *Stuff Happens*. In addition, Hare identifies the theatre as one and the only way of telling the truth which is not more than the words produced by human being on the stage (Gaston, 225). Above all, Hare's main aim in writing *Stuff Happens* is to reveal the background of the Iraq war beside how and why this decision is taken by the power holders just for the sake of their utilities in bureaucracy and diplomacy. At the beginning of the play the then American Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld states that "...free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do all bad things" (3). This quotation might be interpreted in the way that the freedom which is to be brought by the US is not an ordinary freedom so that it will be called as a limited freedom. Indeed, there are some politicians like Colin Powell who claims that the soldiers bear the results of the decisions of the politicians and war should be the last thing to apply (Hare, 4-5). Another essential point in the play is that W. George Bush is portrayed as a narcissist and egoist: "My faith frees me" / "...God wants me to run for President" / "I'm the commander- see, I don't need to explain. I don't need to explain why I say things." (9). These quotations are created on purpose by Hare to help the audience understand the aim of the US. Furthermore, another character in the play and as then the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice reports that the President knows the wealth of the area, and it should be under the control of the power holders (Hare, 10). Her statement is a known American way of controlling anything

all over the world as one of the main strategies of the country. Bush starts their meetings with a prayer (18) which is used deliberately to criticize America and its affairs by turning the issue into a holy deed. In a scene of the play the politicians examine and accept a photo of dirty factories in Iraq as the places where nuclear weapons are produced. Whereas, Powell argues this cannot be accepted as a proof that Iraq produces chemical weapons (13). On an Iraqi channel, a spokesman is shown to criticize the US because of the destructions in Iraq: “the American Cowboy is reaping the fruits of his crimes against humanity” (17). In fact, this statement demonstrates that the Iraq war is nothing but using the conflicts of the country for the sake America’s aims. At the beginning of the conflicts in Iraq, Tony Blair claims that the United Kingdom and US are together in their steps in Iraq and the aim of America is, undoubtedly, standing against the terrorism and creating a world which is free and democratic (17). However, with the speech of the then president of World Bank Group Paul Dundes Wolfowitz, it is made clear what is meant by this insist in the idea of “democracy”:

We’re talking a corrupt dictatorship, run by a man who oppresses his own people and thumbs his nose at American power. We are talking about going and establishing democracy. This is a country which is now very brittle. It will break very easily. It’s sitting there waiting to fall. This is something we can do with very little effort. For a minimum expenditure of effort, we can get maximum result. Take out Saddam and we blow fresh air into the Middle East. (20)

In the seventh scene of the play, Rumsfeld carries the issue a step further: “I could eat a baby through the bars of a crib” (22). Hare deliberately makes Rumsfeld speak out of greediness and cruelty of the US in the Middle East. Colin Powell, succeeded by Rice, threatens the rest of the world: “Who we go against is going to decide who goes with us” (24). Additionally, Rumsfeld defends the necessity of the war and he restates that they will fight under any conditions even it is Ramadan or winter (27). In tenth scene Tony Blair tries to persuade Bush to take the support of the UN because of the possibility of facing opposition of Britain politicians and public (39). Since he knows that only a speculation cannot be shown as a reason for a military action. As it is asked by Sir John Chilcot in the Chilcot Report, a Palestinian Academic asks “Why Iraq?” and “Why now?” and answers that the main aim is the oil (57). A disappointment follows the Iraq war and it is an inevitable end as De Villepin puts: “War is always the sanction of failure.” (107). When an interviewer asks about the misrepresenting of

the US on the chemical weapons claimed to be produced in Iraq, the then Vice President Dick Cheney declares that “Yeah, I did misspeak. We never had any evidence that Hussein had acquired a nuclear weapon” (115). We are also shown contradictions when Rumsfeld reports that “the worse can happen but have not been” whereas Powell accepts they are wrong (116). Nevertheless, when an interviewer asks whether he will make an apology for his misleading in this military action decision, he restates that “I didn’t mislead the world. You can’t mislead somebody when you are presenting what you believe to be the facts” (118).

Conclusion

As a result it can be claimed that a piece of writing is not a being only by itself but it is an entity with its background and co-texts. These co-texts cannot be limited only to the written works because public records, speeches, wars, surveys, statistics, witnesses and many other information sources need to be recognized as the co-texts which provide the data. In that point, all the events, deaths and loses occur throughout the Iraq war are illustrated in a literary text as *Stuff Happens*. More importantly, this literary work cannot be handled by itself because it has a meaning only taking its co-texts into account. For instance, the public records can be seen as co-text and the main material of Hare’s play. On the other hand, the Chilcot Report or Iraq Inquiry can be identified as an official text distinguished as a non-fictional work. For example, all the graphics, statistics and the official data are needed to be applied to create this non-fictional work. Both of these texts outlines the process of the Iraq war from different points but integrates the rights and wrongs of this war process throughout the play script and the survey results. Namely, the history which is proposed in the *Stuff Happens* is textualized by David Hare while the Chilcot Report is historicized by Sir John Chilcot as a text. The story demonstrated in these texts cannot be regarded as the mere truth but they cannot be denied either. Particularly, the historian or the playwright can add and/or eliminate some facts or fictions and specify or extend the limits of the events which affect the factuality of the historical event. Therefore, the objectivity is rendered obscure and blurred as a consequence of the interpretation of the texts surrounded by co-texts.

Work Cited

- Chilcot, J. (2016). *Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary*. Internet resource.
 Cook, J. (2013). Tony Blair’s Tangled Web: The Quartet Representative and the Peace Process. *Journal of Palestine*

- Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 43–60. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2013.42.2.43.
- Dean, W. (1986). The Challenge of the New Historicism. *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 66, no. 3, pp. 261–281. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1203510.
- Gaston, G. (1993). Interview: David Hare. *Theatre Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 213–225. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3208924.
- Hare, D. (2008). *Stuff Happens*. Place of publication not identified: Faber & Faber, Print.
- Hohendahl, P. U. (1992). A Return to History? The New Historicism and Its Agenda. *New German Critique*, no. 55, pp. 87–104. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/488291.
- Iyengar, S. (2002). The Sixteenth Century Journal. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 900–901. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4144088.
- Lee, D. E., and Robert N. B. (1954). The Meaning of ‘Historicism.’ *The American Historical Review*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 568–577. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1844717.
- Reinelt, J. (2005). Theatre Journal. *Theatre Journal*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 303–306. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25069639.
- Weiler, K. (2011). What Happens in the Historian’s Head?. *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 247–253. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41303873.