



**Blook: A New Literary
Genre?**

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Blook: A New Literary Genre?

If the twentieth century was the age of computer, the twenty first century is the age of cyberspace. It is the age of the face book and U Tube. Cyberspace does not only influence how people communicate but also the way people write and think about literature and hence, the emergence of the term electronic /digital literature. The Electronic Literature Organization whose mission is to ‘promote the writing, publishing and reading of literature in electronic media’ formulated a definition of this new field as “working with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand alone or net worked computer” (eliterature.org). This definition is worked to include both work performed in digital media and work created on a computer but published in print such as, for example, hypertext fiction and poetry, on and off the Web, novels that take the form of emails, SMS messages, or blogs. Although this definition is, as Katherine Hayles (2007) describes, ‘slightly tautological’ she believes it draws the attention to two important facts. First, readers go to digital works with expectations formed by print and print literary modes of necessity so it must build on these expectations even as it modifies and transforms them. Second and as a result of the first it is hybrid by nature.



A somewhat older and more familiar form of electronic literature is the blog narrative which has recently given birth to a yet newer narrative genre, namely books: a printed and bound book, based on a blog website; a new stage in the life-cycle of content, if not a new category of content and a new dawn for the book itself (Chambers English Dictionary). As such the present research paper attempts to define books, their beginnings and development as well as to highlight their relation to blogging and blog narratives. It also examines one book namely Julia Powell's *Julie and Julia Project: My Year of Cooking Dangerously* (2005) from a literary standpoint in an attempt to shed light on the characteristics of the new literary form. The analysis demonstrates how the new genre displays characteristics of both the literary memoir and digital literature. Two main theories will be used in the examination. The first is the theory of contemporary memoir to underline points of similarity between memoir as a literary genre and books as a new literary genre. The second is the theorization of electronic literature. The research also highlights some of the problems created by the hybridization of the genre.

It should be underlined that the theorization of books as literary genre is very rare (few researches were found that directly focus on books, see Stutsman) owing to the newness of the genre. Powell's book is chosen since it was a huge success when it was published in 2005

as it sold 100000 copies in that same year. Moreover it inaugurated the blooker prize as a result of which it was adapted for the screen in 2009. (See *Julie & Julia*, a film written and directed by Nora Ephron).

From blogs to books

Books are printed blog narratives. “They are born as blogs then reaches well-known publishers. Others are self-published compilations” (Kharif 2006). The term “Weblog” as Jill Walker Rettberg explains in her book *Blogging* (2008) was used in the early 1990s to refer to the log of visitors that a person who administers a web service can see. Then in December 1997, Jorn Barger, a blogger, proposed that the term should be used differently as he entitles his site “Robot Wisdom: A Weblog by Jorn Barger.” In 1999 “Petrer Merholz noted in the sidebar to his blog: I’ve decided to pronounce the word weblog as wee-blog or ‘blog’ for short” (Blood 2000). By 2002 “Oxford English Dictionary asked Merholz for a print source for the word ‘blog’ so they could include it in their dictionary” (Rettberg 2012, 29).

As Blood claims the year 1999 was a turning point in the history of blogging not only because of the modification done to the term itself but in terms of content and mode of writing. Rebecca Pocket in delineating the history of blogging differentiates between original



weblogs and post1999 blogs. The original weblogs were “link-driven sites. Each was a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays. Weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website” (Blood 2000). As a result weblogs were limited in number, only 23 known to be in existence at the beginning of 1999. During 1999 many soft wares were produced which were “free, and all of them [were] designed to enable individuals to publish their own weblogs quickly and easily” (Blood 2000) which resulted in highly increasing the number of weblogs and the emergence of a new mode of writing blogs. Instead of being link-driven blogs they became a sort of short -form journal often updated several times a day, they turned into “a record of the blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another. Links took the reader to the site of another blogger with whom the first was having a public conversation or had met the previous evening, or to the site of a band he had seen the night before” (Blood 2000).

Both styles still exist today, but with the tremendous increase in the number of blogs the definition of weblogs changes. Instead of being "a list of links with commentary and personal asides," it became “frequently updated

website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first” (Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory).

Blook

Expounding on the coinage of the word ‘blook’ Kharif explains that in 2002 Tony Pierce compiled selected posts from his one-year-old blog and turned the collection into a book called "Blook". The name came about when Pierce held a contest, asking his readers to suggest a title for the book. Jeff Jarvis of BuzzMachine.com won the contest and subsequently invented the term (Kharif 2006).

The world’s first literary prize for books based on blogs was launched in 2005 by its sponsor, Lulu (www.lulu.com), a web site that enables anyone to publish and sell their own book. The prize now known as blooker prize rewards the best blooks in three categories: Fiction, Non-Fiction and Comic-Blooks (based on web-comics), but with one overall winner. It is open to blooks published anywhere by anyone, provided they are in English. The blooker prize official site defines a blook as a bound and printed book based on either a blog or website. The word "based on" here is defined as having content that was developed in a significant way from material originally presented on a blog or website. This can include the



themes, ideas, characters or outline of the material eventually published as a printed book. The first Blooker Prize was awarded in 2006, and it won global media attention. Although the word “blook” itself is new, many books have already been published such as *Baghdad Burning* (2005) published by Feminist Press that recounts experiences of a young girl living in Baghdad. It is based on the blog “Riverbend” created by a 25-years old Iraqi girl who kept her identity concealed for her protection. The blook is forwarded by the writer Ahdaf Soueif and is followed by *Baghdad Burning II* in 2006. *Baghdad Burning I* has sold “nearly 20,000 copies, about five times the volume of an average book sold by a publisher. It was recently nominated for the prestigious Samuel Johnson Prize” (Kharif 2006).

Blooks are gaining momentum; they are springing not only in the West but also in the Arab world specifically in Egypt. There are at least five blogs that have become blooks and at least two of them have achieved wide success as ‘Ayza Agwez.’ A leading publishing house “Dar El Shrouk” has established a series “Malameh” to publish blooks. Reputable publishing houses are paying more attention to this rising genre especially after the huge success of a TV series that was based on one of these blooks.

Books: A Controversial genre

“The motivations behind the evolution of the blog to book vary from economic aspirations to a need for further fame to editors seizing an opportunity of publishing an author with a ready-made audience” (Stutsman, 2012). Blogger Jeff Jarvis, a former editor and publisher who writes the blog BuzzMachine, highlights a very important role played by books. He is of opinion that blocking is the new means to discover talent and new voices that couldn't break into the world of publishing before. He says, "You can go create a property and a voice and an audience without having to go through the publishing meat grinder" (Kornblum 2006). Agreeing with him is blooker Cady Cory, a pioneer in the world of books and bliterature and one of the judges for the blooker prize who is of opinion that “It's the artistic satisfaction of writing what you are interested in – then attracting an audience for it, rather than finding an audience first and then having to write for that audience, plus the fact that books do a good job of showing how a small fragmented audience can be serviced online” (Kornblum 2006).

Some publishers, however, worry that blog readers won't want to read the same entries again in book form. Franklin Dennis, publicity director for the Feminist Press,



notes that many books are only partly comprised of blog entries. Moreover books have their ‘built on’ audience that plays a vital part in promoting books publishing (Kharif 2006).

Books are regarded in a different light in the Arab world. They raise a controversy regarding the literariness of this new literary genre. Professor Isabella Camera D’Afflitto sheds light on the growing popularity of the genre or “of the so-called “bloggers generation” which includes names such as Ahmed Nagi, Ghada Abdel Aal and Ahmed Al Aidy. She, however suspects this new genre:

The arrival of the internet has certainly changed the way people write, but not only in the East. The diaries and thoughts entrusted to blogs can become real published literary works. They are not always, however, of good quality. These theme products do reveal to us a world of young intellectuals of so-called bloggers, hoping to establish a dialogue with each other and to exchange their personal and literary experiences. (D’Afflitto 2010).

Sharing this point of view is poet Ahmed Zarzour. He agrees with D’Afflitto that the internet cannot create a gifted writer. He sees blog literature as a kind of “chatting” that doesn’t abide by the simplest critical or linguistic rules. On the other hand, some bloggers like Ahmed Nael, are

of an opinion that blogging creates writing that is more cynic and that has a wider ability to experiment by revolting against the rules of creative writing (Younis).

Whatever may be the pros and cons of books the final verdict remains with the readers. So the question that must be answered is: are readers buying books? Lulu.com estimates that more than 20% of its 100 top sellers are based on Web site and blog entries. BlogRevolt.com, a blog covering the blogosphere, has just published the fourth part of a series listing writers who got book contracts. The series lists 44 books, a few of which have come out and most of which are in the works (Businessweek online, 25 April 2006). In Egypt, the book Ayza Agwez has been republished in eight editions.

Theorizing Books

In an article on the growing phenomenon of books, Frank Sennett from SpokesmanReview.com recently defined four categories into which most books can be placed and these are: high-concept nonfiction derived from quirky, humorous sites, political broadsides, novels inspired by blogs and memoirs based on blogs. It should be noted that these categories are not clear cut and are highly arguable. For example, the difference between categories 1 and 4 is not entirely clear since Powell's book is referred to in many reviews as a "cooking memoir"



(USA Today) or as a “year in the life memoir” (Atlanta Journal). *Julie and Julia* could also be categorized as a novel based on a blog since Powell added imaginative parts to the posts she uses from her blog.

Moreover, more categories can be added to the above mentioned ones. Novels serialized in blogs is one of them. This is in addition to web comics which is specified by the booker prize as one of the three categories eligible for winning the prize. Another category that could be added and would apply to a large number of books is the dairy-style books that are based on the dairy-style blogs. These books consist of a collection of blog posts compiled in a book without any alterations on part of the booker. These blog posts may be connected in a direct or indirect way. They may also include fictional or nonfictional entries. In this kind of books each story is a self-contained unit that contributes to an overall narrative. Each story makes sense in itself but read together- not necessarily in sequence- the book tells a larger story. The overall story resulting from reading a book is likely to be pieced together from fragments. As such the resulting book is in fact a collection of short stories and is labeled as “fiction and other writing from a blog.” *Only What Is* by American writer Richard Cohen is one example. In Egypt this kind of writing is labeled “Blogs Literature” as Basma Abu Rehab’s *Rice Pudding for Two*.

Julie and Julia: A Case Study

A narrative is anything that tells or presents a story, be it by text, picture, performance, or a combination of these (Barthes 1975 [1966], Chatman 1990, Bal 1985). In other words, a narrative is a form of communication which presents a sequence of events caused and experienced by characters and *Julie and Julia* certainly fits this definition. *Julie and Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously* (2005) is based on the Julie/Julia project blog that the author started in 2002. Julie and Julia tells the story of a woman who turns 30-years-old and lives in a small apartment in Queens, working at a secretarial job that she hates. She needs something to break the monotony of her life so she decides to cook and blog. She takes her mother's copy of Julia Child's 1961 classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and decides to cook all 524 recipes in one year. She also decides to start blogging about her adventures in her tiny kitchen which enables her to analyze why and how this decision is significant in her life. But to which narrative genre do blooks belong to?

Powell's blook has been reviewed as a "cooking memoir" (USA Today), and "year-in-the-life memoir" (Atlanta Journal-Constitution). Since memoir has recently come to be the preferred term for literary life writing (Couser 2012, 9) then memoir blooks could be considered as a literary genre. As a matter of fact memoir blooks



share many of the characteristics of the literary memoir as well as displaying other novel ones.

Memoir has recently permeated contemporary culture. In *Memoir: A History* (2009), Ben Yagoda believes that Memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged. (7)

No wonder then that during the last twenty years autobiography and the old memoirs have been reborn as literary memoir and transformed into a lively and a highly readable genre that is termed as contemporary memoir (CM) (Kirby and Kirby 2007, 1). Yagoda notes that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, memoirs were usually about someone else -- for example, someone might write a memoir of his relationship with Charles Dickens. Only in the late 20th century did people start writing memoirs about themselves and labeling their works as "memoirs" in their titles. There is much difference between the old memoir and the contemporary memoir. The best example of the reborn genre read like good novels rather than dry accounts of historic or daily events

(Kirby and Kirby 2010, 23). This is because memoir comes to share many narrative techniques and devices with the novel. (Couser 2012, 9)

Unlike autobiography, “which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer’s life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance” (Zinsser 1998, 15), and Powell is doing exactly that. Powell is not writing a comprehensive autobiography, she does not document every facet of her life but she concentrates on the time that took her to finish the 524 recipes in Julia’s cooking book and the significant moments during that period. In accordance with the characteristics of the contemporary memoir, Powell does not include in her blook the 524 entries of her blog, but rather concentrates on specific episodes and meaningful moments that occurred during that period. One of the most significant moments in her life is when her mother tells her that her father loves another woman. She asks her not to tell her brother and she kept the promise until Heathcliff tells her that she is not the marrying type. She becomes so annoyed and tries to prove to her brother that he knows nothing about the meaning of marriage:

I finally broke it that night over our artichokes and tomato omelettes-blurting out at Heathcliff, as if in revenge, that when he was in the first grade his



father had slept with another woman, and that his parents stayed together anyway, not because they were “the marrying type” but because they worked like hell and loved each other more than they’d hurt each other-I began to shake, and a lump of dread, small but heavier than iron, threatened to close up my throat entirely, as if my body judges choking to death a better fate than telling a secret. (92-3)

The personalized narrative relates well to readers who are accustomed to reading blogs, as they feel welcomed into the writer’s world.

In her essay “Memory and Imagination” Patricia Hampl observes that contemporary memoir resides at the intersection of narration and reflection, of storytelling and exposition, ‘it can present its story and consider the meaning of that story (*I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory* 1999, 33). Powell includes in her book a contemplation of the meaning of her life at the time of the writing of her memoir. So as she moves from the simple Potage Parmentier (potato soup) into the more complicated realm of aspics and crêpes, she reveals a great deal of herself, her life with her husband Eric as well as her views on the different aspects of life. She tries to understand her parents’ imperfect marriage, her own marriage as well as her girlfriends’ lives as single women.

Commenting on the character of one of her friends, Sally, she says:

What I like when it comes down to it, is the gleeful, sex-crazed, willfully neurotic Sally. The Sally who doesn't care about being married like her dull sister, who knows that not one of the boys she brings over for us to meet is one hit good enough for her- not smart enough, not kind enough with no gift to match her percolating laugh, her voice that can spread its champagne bubbles throughout a room of strangers. (87)

In another instance, Julie reflects on the changes that happen in her life after starting the project. She was living in a world that 'was subjugated under the tyranny of entropy'; she was 'just a secretary-shaped confederation of atoms, fighting the inevitability of mediocrity and decay.' After the project however, she took 'anger and despair and rage and transformed it with [her] alchemy into hope and ecstatic mania.' The project gave her 'energy that was never lost,' and a sense of direction and meaning to her life (2005, 124-5). The project is not only about cooking but it is about writing as well:

Here, I took a crap laptop and some words that popped into my head at seven in the morning and I turned them into something people wanted, maybe even needed. (125)



But insights into her life as well as her friends' lives are not Powell's only concerns. Since one of her goals in writing her blog is to write about her cooking experience, Powell includes in her memoir the recipes that she tries during her project. In fact, each episode in the memoir is entitled by the number of the day as well as the number of the recipe that she tries during that day, for example, "Day 36, Recipe 48" (59). There is no day mentioned without a recipe given that was tried during that day. As such, Powell's book is often categorized as a "cook book" or a book about cookery and Powell herself is often described as "a culinary thinker" (David Kamp, *New York Times Book Review*). In their *New Directions in Teaching Memoir* (2007) Kirby and Kirby draws the attention to the fact that among the different phenomena associated with the development of the contemporary memoir is the way in which writers blurred the hard lines of genre distinction which leads to the genre hybridization (5). Powell's merging of her recipes and cooking observations and her life memoir is a clear example of the innovation that could be brought to the genre.

However, Suman Gupta in *Globalization and Literature* (2009) believes that new genres, like blog fiction, shouldn't be analyzed according to previously conceived literary qualities:

If we continue with a focus on blogs, instead of looking for the literary qualities of blog fiction, as if ‘literary’ is an abstract normative measure which may or may not apply to this neglected realm, we may consider whether the blog could be thought of as a literary genre. (58)

Gupta’s opinion should also apply to blook. Seen thus, blook as a literary genre presents several critical differences from the conventional memoir genre.

An important feature that appears in Powell’s blook is the “participatory polyvocal authorship” (Gupta 2009, 60). Powell includes comments made by the readers of her blog that she starts with her cooking project. The blog readers are almost in a way co-writers — certainly inspirations,” Powell says (Kornblum 2006). The following comments are a clear example of the different voices that participate in compiling the blook:

Julie? Are you there? You’re not going to quit, are you? It can only get better from here. And think of the dark void that would overcome our world if you quit now.-Chris
None of the rest of us out here are ever going to make 1/8 the recipes in any cookbook in our whole lifetimes. We love the project, but my God! What about one dish a day? Like peas on



Tuesday, chicken on Wednesday, ladyfingers on Saturday? It doesn't have to be all or nothing is what I am saying. Just do your best. We are all behind you- and you too Eric!- Pinky (196)

The string of comments provided goes on for two pages and this is repeated in different occasions. In fact, the presence of a readership encourages Powell to cook. What is more important is that these comments are weaved in the events. In other words, from the structural point of view the readers' comments are an integral part of the book itself:

See? They loved me out here! They just wanted me to be happy, and to blog and blog and blog. They understood my pain.

Whenever I get an age-related funk, a good friend always reminds me, "These are the good old days." He is right, in ten years I will probably look back and think my life is just hunky-dory right now. Thirty was wonderful; my husband was a great man (he died ten years ago), I had options, job possibilities, etc. I am looking forward to fifty, who knows. Good luck, Julie, with pulling yourself out of your funk...- Cindy

Gosh. I suppose Cindy had a point. Things could be worse, I guess... (210)

Cindy's comment is part of the text and her voice is one of many voices that are heard in the blook. These voices moreover are in a discontinuous dialogue with Powell, pushing her forward and supporting her all through her project. Commenting on this feature, Gupta (2009) writes:

Most blogs invite comments from readers, and bloggers often devote parts of their blogs to responding to comments. In blogs which intervene or are located within areas of heated topical debate... large sections are devoted to bloggers responding to such comments from readers. To an extent therefore, readers become authorial agents and authors reading subjects in an interlinked process. (60)

Being based on blogs, blooks share the same tendency and display the same characteristic and hence destabilizes the idea of the authorship tradition. Stutsman claims, however, that although Powell acknowledges her readers' assistance, yet she denies them coauthorship. 'In Blogging and blooks: Communal authorship in a contemporary context' Stutsman explains that "while the inclusion of the blog readers could potentially detract from [her] narrative authority, Powell...creates stories based on communicable experience by referencing [her] readers' thoughts and



contributions. In doing so, [she] gives [her] readers a voice, although it is one that [she] controls.”

Another controversial feature that memoir blocks display is “the associational reader constructed reading” as Jupta puts it (2009, 55). The reader may jump off from one text to another or from any part of the text to another. In dairy style blocks moving from one text to another is permissible since each text is an independent entity. It is true that the sequence of the texts as they appear in the book may be intentional by the blauthor, yet the reader has the freedom to apply his own logic on the sequence of the texts, a behavior which will generate numerous reading experiences for the single block. In Powell’s memoir block the case is slightly different. The reader may not have the freedom to jump off from one episode to another but he/she may have the chance to move among the three different concerns of the block according to his/her preference.

There are three different concerns in Powell’s block: Powell’s life memoirs, her cooking experience and recipes and Powell’s creation of Julia Child’s life.). Powell adds imaginative parts about the lives of Paul Childe and Julia McWilliams Child, inspired by events described in the journals and letters of Paul Childe, the letters of Julia McWilliams and the biography of Julia Child, *Appetite for Life* by Noel Riley Fitch. These parts occupy separate

sections and are written in italics to distinguish them from her own life experiences. This topographical change produces a constantly shifting perspectives that allows the readers to navigate from Powell's blog narrative to Julia Child's fictional narrative.

Powell, moreover, is very keen to include a recipe in each episode she includes in her memoir which gives the chance to any reader to read either her memories of her life or her memories of cooking the different recipes. The following comments from goodreads.com testify to the interest of many readers in Powell's cooking experience and her recipes:

Kathy Harrington, January 9, 2009 (view all comments by Kathy Harrington)

It's rare for me to read a book that actually transports me, but Julie Powell managed to bring me right down into her little outer-borough kitchen with this vibrant, funny, engaging tale of her self-imposed year-long journey through MtAoFC. Her culinary pilgrimage with reader in tow is anything but dull: it carries us through cursing, crying kitchen dramas (mirroring some of my own experiences) to self-satisfied successes to laugh-out-loud food failures to near-tears disappointment. This is a must-read for



anyone who loves to cook and a justificatory read for anyone who hates being in the kitchen! Thoroughly enjoyable, I loved every minute of it. [foodiegirl](#), September 21, 2009 ([view all comments by foodiegirl](#))

I saw the movie with my daughter her friend and my girlfriend. We are all major foodies. I haven't laughed so hard in a long time. Very 27dorable and fun to see. I bought both books Julie and Julia project which I am currently reading and really like it. It is light and fun. I also bought MtAoFC, not so fun, I am amazed that Julie could do that many recipes without falling apart. I made a few and my family could not take it, too much butter etc. too hard to much time. I think Julia Child did not understand what Julie was doing. A lot of people have made fun of Julia throughout the years (like Sat, night live!) she had a funny way about her. So we think that Julia thought Julie was making fun of her on her blog. I do not believe this was true. I am very proud of how accomplished Julie was in her cooking, very admirable. My apron goes off to her. Happy cooking!

(8 of 10 readers found this comment helpful)

lbracken, September 8, 2009 ([view all comments by lbracken](#)) BonjourJulie,

I am reading Julia's book and I cannot believe that you cooked the 524 recipes within one year, every single one of them rich with butter and/or whipping cream. It would mean that you cooked an average of 10 such rich recipes per week, including 9 ducks and one goose within that year! You inevitably must have put on weight and your cholesterol must have gone sky high! Yes? Did you really cooked every single recipe and every version of those recipes? It is hard for me to believe. Should I? I wished that you had written more about the results of your cooking and your trying all those recipes!

akatawa, November 7, 2009 ([view all comments by akatawa](#))

Dear Julie, I've just read the book and was totally in love with it (whatever stupid it sounds). Very good sense of humor, poor cats ☺ and amazing description of being a secretary. Thank you. I had a good time reading it. I'm just dying to know if it is at any chance possible



to get a recipe of the spiced pecan cake with pecan icing? Though there is a description of it in the book, but it would be great to have more detailed information. Thanks a lot and waiting for the next books to come. Best wishes from Ukraine.

[pillywallis](#), August 7, 2009 ([view all comments by pillywallis](#))

I had heard about this new movie in June but didn't pay much attention. While looking through the cookbook section at my local library I found Julie and Julia. Of course I picked it up and started reading. The more I read the more I knew I needed to own this book. Books I love I read very slowly and then read again. I'm on round two. Julie's writing is so honest and raw it needs to be read again.

These comments underline the fact that some readers are more interested in Powell's cooking skills than her literary or narrative skills. Others, however, may be interested in Julia Child's story as Powell devotes complete separate sections to Julia Child's story that could open another reading experience. This associational reader-constructed reading undermines, Gupta believes, many literary preconceptions and concepts as "the given structures of the fictional text along the expected lines of

formal structure (e.g. beginning, middle and end; chapter and part divisions)...” (55).

It should be noted, however, that Powell never intended her blook to be about food or Julia Child as she asserts in an interview:

It really wasn't a question when I was writing it, because I don't think I'm capable of writing a book [just about food]. There are people much more capable of writing a real food book, a book about food in terms of being about cooking or commenting on any sort of sociological or historical analysis of food. That's never what I was going to write, and people who come to the book with the expectation that it's going to be a companion to *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* or history of the book or of Julia Child are obviously going to be disappointed because that's not what it is. (Chung)

In spite of Powell's assertion *Julie and Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously* has been classified as “a book about food, family, friends and love” (Library Journal) and in the library of Congress cataloging -in-publication data indexes it as “Women cooks—Anecdotes. Cookery—Anecdotes” and by Karen Fernau in Arizona Republic reviews of Powell's blook as a “narrative-style



cookbook.” As such the book destabilizes also the idea of genres blurring the boundaries traditionally set between them.

It is not always the reader, however, who undermines the literary traditions, and sometimes the blauthor herself violates them. Powell provides her readers with three endings. The first is the end of her cooking project:

And that was it, really. A secretary in Queens risked her marriage and her sanity and her cats' welfare to cook all 524 recipes in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*- a book that changed the lives of thousands of servantless American - all in one year. The same year she turned thirty. It was the hardest, bravest, best thing a coward like her ever did and she wouldn't have done it without Julia.

The End (297)

Then she provides an end to Julia Child's story when Julia decides to join a professional class for chefs:

She turned to him, her face suddenly thoughtful. "You know? I think it just might be." She laughed and he laughed along with her. "Maybe it's a new beginning for the old girl!" (300)

She begins the next episode entitled "...Well, Not Quite" by saying "The thing I keep learning about endings is that they aren't a long time coming, and they don't sneak up on you either, because ending just don't happen" (201). Powell then concludes this part by telling the reader about the new book that she begins to write thus providing a third ending for the blook itself:

Let's just say "The End" and leave it at that.

Oh, and thanks.

Thanks for everything. (307)

Another problem that Powell's blook poses is the "panfictionality" (Ryan 1997) of the personal narratives. The doctrine of panfictionality is the postmodern rejection of the traditional distinction between fiction and nonfiction in favor of a model that regards all narrative texts as fictional. Since Powell writes in the author notes that many of their identifying details, individuals and events throughout her blook have been altered for the sake of discretion, she contributes in asserting the panfictionality of memoirs and personal narratives in general. This is, however, one of the characteristics that blooks inherit from blogs since sometimes blogs that are written as though they are authentic turn out to be fictional as Rettberg underlines in her theorization of blogging (2012, 111).



Not all of these features are shared by all books and there is no doubt that some books come very close to the contemporary memoir but what is beyond doubt that books are becoming a literary form that “disperses notions of authorship and reading and textuality into an intricate mesh which invites reconfiguration of received literary concepts” (Gupta 61). That is why there is an ongoing dispute among critics and readers as well concerning whether books could be considered a literary genre. Whatever the result of this dispute might be the fact remains that books are creating a genre which has both continuities and disruptions with other narrative genres. They collapse many of the common assumptions made about texts and establish new norms and open new horizons for the other narrative genres.

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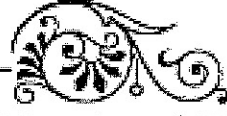
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**Propaganda in Eugene
Ionesco's *The Leader* and
David Hare's *Stuff Happens***

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Propaganda in Eugene Ionesco's *The Leader* and David Hare's *Stuff Happens*

This paper aims at examining the role of propaganda in two different political regimes, namely, the totalitarian and the democratic from postmodernist perspective. Believing that propaganda played an important role during the two world wars, the Romanian-French dramatist Eugene Ionesco (1909-1940) in his play *The Leader* (1953) has set out to explore how Nazis used it in implementing their policies. In a similar vein, the British dramatist David Hare in *Stuff Happens* has attempted to bring into focus how the world great leaders have relied heavily on propaganda to justify their invasion of Iraq. The present study will refer to Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, and Walter Lippmann's theories of gatekeeping and agenda-setting in discussing the importance of propaganda and its different techniques.

Philip M. Taylor in *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda From the Ancient World to the Present Era* (2003), explains how propaganda is often regarded as a deadly weapon used by those in power to implement their ideas as well as gain legitimacy for their actions:

Propaganda afflicts our individual and collective capacity to make up our own minds about what is happening in the world around us. It forces us to

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think and do things in ways we might not otherwise have done had we been left to our own devices. . . . It becomes the enemy of independent thought and an intrusive and unwanted manipulator of the free flow of information and ideas in humanity's quest for peace and truth. It is therefore, something which democracies, at least, ought not to do. It suggests the triumph of emotion over reason in a bureaucratic struggle by the machinery of power for control over the individual. (1)

Significantly, Taylor's words highlight the negative role played by propaganda in blinding people's eyes from perceiving the truth and of robbing them of their logic as well as of rendering them into puppets in the hands of the ruling class. He condemns this kind of propaganda and recommends that it must not be used in democratic societies. In this light, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions: Does propaganda in the Nazi regime differ from that of the democratic countries? What kind of propaganda techniques is used in these political regimes?

After witnessing two world wars in Europe, and the Fascist movement that swept the European countries in general, and Romania in particular, the Romanian-French dramatist Eugene Ionesco developed a great disdain to



Nazism and to the way Nazi leaders used propaganda to attract its followers. He "hated the Nazi political climate in Romania"(MC Teague 621) and in many interviews, he revealed that "one of his personal dramas was witnessing friends and family members succumb to the ideology of a Fascist movement in 1930s Romania (Lupas 80).

He even made it clear how "Nazi ideology . . . put him in conflict with his father, who was a member of the Nazi controlled Iron Guard" (626). Highlighting the conflict between them, Ionesco says: "My father represented the state and believed in the power that be. As far as he was concerned, all opposition was wrong. As far as I was concerned, all opposition was right" (Ionesco 16).

It is worth mentioning that Nazi ideology and practice emerged in Germany after its defeat in World War I. It was associated with the German Nazi party as well as other far-right groups. It was:

An intellectual nationalism based on the idea of the racial superiority of the organically unified German people (Volk). The state (Reich) represented the political expression of the union of land and people. This Ideology was anti-parliamentary (represented parties disrupted the unity of the Volk) and anti-capitalism and modernity were antipathetic to the natural state of

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the Volk). The state attained its highest state of virtue by war and the shedding of blood. (Shirer 129)

As a major figure of the Theatre of the absurd "that emerged in the wake of the pessimism and despair that swept Europe after World War II" (MC Teague 625), and as a witness to the horrors of Nazism, Ionesco dedicated his theatrical talent to "attack Fascism and the Nazi movement" (624). He created plays that attacked Nazi leaders and showed how they used propaganda "to transform people into animals that behaved like monsters in a herd" (Freud 20). In *Eugene Ionesco Revisited* (1966) Deborah B. Gaensbeur reveals how Ionesco's plays are saturated with his hatred of Nazism:

Eugene Ionesco's conscious and unconscious memories of the Romanian of 1930s and early 1940s accompanied him throughout his life and directly inspired his plays. The rise in Romania of the extreme right-wing Iron Guard or Legionary movement and Ionesco's distressing experience of growing fanaticism among Romanian intellectuals, and even among his closest literary friends, was acknowledged by him as one of the sources of his plays. (127)



Relying on his painful memory of Romania in 1930s and 1940s, Ionesco in *The Leader* launches a severe attack against Nazism and its manipulation of various propaganda techniques, namely the media to implement its policy. The play offers unflattering portrait of the Nazi regime that managed to rob people of their logic and rational thinking.

It is worth mentioning that the historical origin of Nazi propaganda can be traced back to Adolf Hitler who claimed that Germany was defeated in The First World War because of its failure to recognize the importance of propaganda. Thus during his leadership of Germany (1933-1945) he set up a Ministry of Information and Propaganda in 1933 and made Joseph Goebbels in charge of it. The target of this ministry was to implement Nazi beliefs by monitoring what people read and see. In other words, Hitler wanted to make sure that all books, newspapers, radio programs, films propagate Nazi ideas.

Moreover, his book *Mein Kampf* (1925) discusses the importance of propaganda as an effective tool in indoctrinating a population and propagating Nazi ideology. Explaining the mission of the propagandist, Hitler says:

The first duty of the propagandist is to win over people who can subsequently be taken into the organization. And the first duty of the organization is to select and train men who

will be capable of carrying on the propaganda. The second duty of the organization is to disrupt the existing order of things and thus make room for the penetration of the new teaching which it represents, while the duty of the organizer must be to fight for the purpose of securing power, so that the doctrine may finally triumph. (320)

Thus, in his endeavor to propagate Nazi ideas and justify the genocide of Jews and homosexuals, Hitler resorted to propaganda. Similarly, *The Leader* in the selected play for this study has been keen to follow Hitler's example by using propaganda, to implement his ideas and influence the masses.

Due to technological advancements in the field of communication, the postmodern era became to be known as media-saturated since every aspect of human life is largely informed and shaped by the media. In *Contemporary Social Theory Investigation and Application* (2005) T. Delaney sheds light on the dominance of the media in postmodern era. According to him, "people are no more guided by their elders . . . they are being guided by mass media" (265). He further adds that people have changed from being "inner-directed" to "other-directed" (265).

Since the main objective of propaganda is to make people believe that what is being done is in the best interest



of everyone, Nazi leaders have set out "to utilize all of the technical means at their disposal the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings" (Ellul 9) to achieve their target. Hitler, for instance, has skillfully used all these techniques to propagate Nazi ideology. David Welch in *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (1993) explains how Joseph Goebbels, a leading member of the German Nazi Party, and the Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in Adolf Hitler's government refers to the influence of the media particularly, the spoken words upon the masses. Highlighting Goebbels's belief Welch states that :

In his speech to the press 15 March 1933, Goebbels referred to the press as a piano on which the government could plan to influence the public in whatever direction it desired. Although the Nazis looked upon the press as an instrument of mass influence, they were aware that their success had been due more to the spoken than to the printed word. (44)

In this respect, Ionesco has employed the character of the Announcer as a representative of the media that aims at serving the leader and those in power. In "Culture, Society and the Media" (1983), James Curran and others explain that "Media institutions are regarded as being locked into

the power structure and consequently as acting largely in tandem with the dominant institutions in society" (281). This is clearly demonstrated in the Announcer's attempt to idealize the leader. Although the media's main objective is to work for the interest of people and serve their needs, the Announcer here becomes the mouthpiece of the leader and his tool to exercise control over the people.

The play opens with the Announcer broadcasting excitedly the gathering of the crowd in the streets in order to meet their Leader whom they greatly admire. He is seen enhancing the growth of the enthusiastic atmosphere, which increases as the leader approaches: "There he is! There he is! At the end of the street! Hurrah! Hurrah! The Leader! Long live the leader!" (*TL* 109). By employing his verbal skills, he has successfully managed in keeping the masses eager as well as enthusiastic to meet their leader.

Hitler in his book *Mein Kampf* explains that one of the key functions of propaganda is to bring certain subjects within the field of vision of the masses. This means that the population has to be orientated towards specific information. He also adds that in order to ensure success, the information Nazi leaders aspire to implement must be repeated all the time and in a rather simple manner. He explains:



But the most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principal is borne in mind constantly and with unflagging attention. It must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over. Here, as so often in this world, persistence is the first and most important requirement. (138)

Significantly, the Announcer in this play is engaged in the task of directing the public's attention to one specific goal, namely, the greatness of their leader. He is seen broadcasting every action the Leader does in an almost repetitive and detailed manner. It is obvious that he aspires to impress them by making them believe that their leader is perfect and worthy of their respect and admiration. In his endeavor to achieve his task, he reports the following:

The Leader is smiling He tastes the flowers and the fruits growing in the stream. He's also tasting the roots of the trees. He summons the little children to come unto him. He has confidence in everybody. He inaugurates the police force. He pays tribute to justice. He salutes the great victors and the great vanquished. Finally he recites a poem. The people are moved. (TL 113)



The Leader as the Announcer explains is a great lover of nature who enjoys tasting flowers and fruits. He is of an agreeable character who keeps smiling at people and is friendly with children. Moreover, he shows a great respect to the police. He has also a great talent in reciting poetry. As shown, the Announcer here attempts to focus their attention on specific information, namely, the unique characteristics of their leader.

Again Hitler recommends that propaganda must appeal to the emotions and imaginations of the masses and not their intellect since "their receptivity . . . is very limited, and their intelligence is small" (169). Highlighting the significance of this technique, he states that

The art of propaganda consists precisely in being able to awaken the imagination of the public through an appeal to their feelings, in finding the appropriate psychological form that will arrest the attention and appeal to the hearts of the national masses. . . . The great majority of a nation is so feminine in its character and outlook that its thought and conduct are ruled by sentiment rather than by sober reasoning. (137)

The idea of appealing to the masses' feelings and imagination as a fundamental technique in propaganda is



skillfully handled by keeping the Leader off stage most of the time and only the Announcer sees him. In that case, the public relies heavily on the Announcer's description of the Leader's actions and behavior since he is the only who is capable of seeing him. Taking advantage of this situation, the Announcer starts to manipulate their imaginations and stir their emotions. By relying on his verbal skills, he has set out to give them a detailed account of the wonderful deeds that he is performing.

In his book *Public Opinion* (1922) Walter Lippmann introduces the idea of "The world outside and the pictures in our heads" (3) in which he explains how the media shapes public opinion by creating false and unreal images of the world. He also adds that in order for the propaganda to achieve its goals, "There must be some barrier between the public and the event"(29). This separation will enable the media to carry out gatekeeping and introduce agenda-setting in its attempt to shape and influence public opinion. Lippmann states that "The pseudo-environment that is conveyed to us by the media is the result of a high degree of gatekeeping in the news process" (237). By means of gatekeeping, the media filters the information and determines the content and nature of the news that must be presented to the public.

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Significantly, the idea of gatekeeping is skillfully handled in the play by showing how the Announcer has intentionally withheld the information that the leader, to whom the public wait anxiously to see, is headless. Knowing that the public relies heavily on his description of the leader, he has set out to filter and select the information that he wants to present about him. He has been keen to focus only on the actions and behavior that make them believe that he is unique and great.

Lippmann in *Public Opinion* also adds that gatekeeping is followed by agenda-setting that aims at setting a nation's agenda by structuring the public's way of thinking and directing their attention towards specific ideas (238). Thus by monitoring, selecting and filtering the information presented to the public, the media manages to implement the government's policy. Again this is clearly demonstrated in the play where the Announcer is seen selecting the information that he presents to the masses about their leader. His target is to render them subservient to the system and thus fulfilling his nation's agenda.

By exercising full control over their imaginations and feelings, as well as by choosing the kind of information presented to them, he has managed to rob them of their logic and blur their vision. This is clearly demonstrated in his endeavors to brainwash them upon discovering that their



leader is headless. He tries to make them believe that there is nothing wrong with their leader being headless since his genius compensates such defect. Trying to twist facts, he tells the Girl Admirer: "What's he need a head for when he's got a genius!" (*TL* 116). As shown throughout the play, the Leader is being depicted in a rather absurd manner. The dramatist has given him a monstrous shape by making him headless. He has been keen to show that this headless leader is a soulless body. In other words, his actions and behavior reflect the emptiness of his soul and mind. He seems incapable of taking decisions or directing his people to what is good for them. He is only engaged in actions that most politicians do. For instance, he shakes hands with people, kisses babies' heads, "embraces the little girl . . . and calls her my child" (*TL* 112). He also "signs autographs . . . dances with the hedgehog in his hand" (*TL* 111).

Obviously, there is nothing special about him; nothing he does distinguish him from other politicians. The choice of a headless leader is not by chance. What the playwright aims at communicating is that: the authority which has absolute power and deprives people of their logic and rights is a body without a head. Thus this headless leader symbolizes Nazi leaders who according to Ionesco are the major cause behind the regression of human civilization. Ironically, this headless leader is loved and respected by his people who wait impatiently in the streets

to catch a glimpse of him. Thus the popularity that this headless leader enjoys is due to the powerful effect of the media that has managed to "screen their mind from reality, pervert their understanding and make them blind" (Gaensbeur 132).

In *The Early Goebbels Diaries* (1962) Joseph Goebbels explains how within weeks of taking office, Hitler has managed to change German life. He states: "The revolution that we have made is a total revolution. It encompasses every aspect of public life from the bottom up . . . we have replaced individuality with collective racial consciousness". One can easily deduce that by mastering propaganda techniques, Hitler has managed to alter his society and implement Nazi ideology. It is quite obvious that the Leader in this selected play has followed Hitler's example. The masses depicted here have no distinctive identities. Their depersonalization is clearly manifested in the slogans that can be heard from the backstage that sound like sheep bleating. They also "display automatic systematized behavior" (Gaensbeur 132) upon hearing that their leader is about to make his public appearance.

They also seem estranged not only from themselves but from one another. Their dilemma of losing their identities is shown in the concluding lines of the play where they are seen uttering the same question "what's your



name?" (TL 116). Significantly, these lines show the strong influence of the media upon people. The media has succeeded in helping the leader to erase people's identities and thus rendering them into puppets. Highlighting the target behind the depersonalization of the people, particularly in totalitarian regime, Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1996) explains that "Totalitarian leaders rely on the power of masses" (72) to establish their power. Thus with the help of the media, the leader has been able to transform people into a herd who are incapable of rational thinking or differentiating between right and wrong. By doing so, he has been able to implement his policy and establish his authority.

In *Stuff Happens*, the British playwright David Hare has dealt with the idea of propaganda to show how the American president George W. Bush used it to stir up feelings of hatred of Iraq after September 11 and provide justification for the invasion. Opened eighteen months after the invasion; the play begins with a discussion held by Bush's National Security Council in early 2001, about Iraq's ability to produce weapons of mass destruction. Then it covers briefly the events of September 11, the invasion of Afghanistan, Bush's warning against "the axis of evil" and his accusations against Iraq. Act two examines the negotiations between the U.S., the U.K., and the United Nations and shows how the U.S. pursues a resolution for



war. The play concludes with Bush and Blair's agreement to launch the invasion.

Hare in this play has attempted to examine the power of propaganda in justifying the war in Iraq. The play shows how the American president and the British prime minister lacked solid evidence that Iraq manufactured weapons of mass destruction. By looking at a photograph recently captured of Iraq, Tent, the CIA director utters the following:

There is no confirming intelligence, no that they are definitely producing chemical or biological weapons. I am not claiming that. I'm saying, 'Look at the photo-look at it-and what you will see is a factory clearly consistent.' And if they were producing such weapons-if- they were, if such weapons were being produced, then this-seen here-would be the kind of factory, this looks just like the factory from which such weapons would come. (*SH* 14)

It is obvious that the CIA has failed to find a solid proof that supported the allegations that Iraq poses a threat to the entire world by producing weapons of mass destruction. In that case, America and its allies will not be able to launch the invasion since "Military force demands solid evidence that a threat is imminent and war is



unavoidable" (Fisher 390). Holding the belief that the key to winning the war against Iraq lies in propaganda and media control, Bush and Blair have skillfully manipulated it to achieve their target. In an article entitled "Deciding on War Against Iraq: Institutional Failures" (2003), Louis Fisher shows how Bush administration conducted war propaganda to gain public support:

For over a year, the administration supplied a steady stream of unreliable statements. At no time did it make a persuasive, credible, or consistent case for war. Much of its rationale was exploded on a regular basis by the press. The campaign for war was dominated more by fear than facts, more by assertions of what might be, or could be, or used to be, than by what actually existed. (389)

Significantly, the techniques used by Bush administration in influencing public opinion are similar to that introduced by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. In order to gain support for military action in Iraq, the American administration has adopted two of Hitler's techniques, namely, repetition and the appeal to the emotions and imaginations of the people. They have skillfully used the media to repeat the idea of how Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction and how these weapons represent a direct and immediate threat. They also have tried to stir their anger



by creating images of the horror they will experience if action is not taken against Saddam Hussein.

One of the propaganda techniques that Hitler skillfully employed was making the public believe that there is a strong link between loyalty to one's country and loyalty to one's military. In his attempt to make people support his war agenda, he utters the following:

The aim for which we were fighting the war was the war was the loftiest, the most overpowering, that man can conceive: it was the freedom and independence of our nation, the security of our future . . . and our national honor: a thing which, despite all contrary opinions prevailing today, nevertheless exists, or rather should exist, since peoples without honor have sooner or later lost their freedom and independence, which in turn is only the result of a higher justice, since generations of rabble without honor deserve no freedom. (133)

By referring to such concepts as "Freedom", "Security" and "Honor", Hitler's endeavors to gain public support is established. Following 9/11, the American president has cleverly adopted Hitler's war propaganda, to serve his own agenda. Therefore, in his attempt to gain public support, he



has skillfully performed the role of a propagandist. He has delivered lengthy speeches to the Americans to justify his intention of attacking Iraq:

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. All nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. 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 . . . we will see freedom's victory. (*SH* 32-3)

Significantly, this speech illustrates Bush's attempt to establish a link between terrorism and Baghdad. As Hitler targeted the Jews in his speeches and made his people believe that they were the chief reason for their problems, Bush too has made the entire world think that Iraq served terrorism. Following Hitler's techniques, he has deliberately repeated certain words as "Terror", "Grave", "Danger", "Security" and "Freedom" for the sake of evoking the

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feelings of anger and fear, on the one hand, and makes the Americans believe that in order to prove their loyalty to their country, they must support the decision of fighting Iraq since it is the only way to protect their security and end terrorism, on the other.

In *The Right Man* (2003) David Frum, a speech writer in the Bush White House explains how "Bush hated repetition and redundancy and still he is never tired of repeating that a link existed between Iraq and al Qaeda, even if the evidence remained tenuous and unpersuasive" (48). Significantly, Frum's words carry a strong condemnation of Bush's policy. As the president of a great democratic country, he is expected to be honest with his people and provide them the truth. Nevertheless, he is seen following Nazis' policy of fooling the public. Thus by mastering their tactics, he has managed to "transform the war into a march towards . . . freedom" (Lasswell 76).

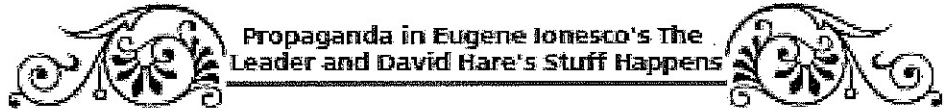
Although no evidence was found to support U.S claims that the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, nevertheless, Bush's war propaganda has successfully managed to win the support of the British Prime Minister, and the French president. For example, Tony Blair expresses his support of the U.S. initiative to fight terrorism. He states that: "This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism,



but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends. We will not rest until this evil is driven from the world" (*SH* 17). The French also declare that they "are all Americans now" (*SH* 17).

As Hitler used propaganda to serve his own agenda, so did Bush. By mastering the art of propaganda particularly his manipulation of the media, he has set out to prove that America is still the world number one power particularly after the 9/11 attacks. Aspiring to restore his country's pride Bush tells Blair about his decision to put an end to Saddam Hussein's regime: "At this moment, I'm finding the subject of Iraq seems to be moving up the agenda. It's moving up all the time. I'm sitting here and since 9/11 I've been getting very strong feelings that this is something we cannot leave alone. Saddam has to be dealt with" (*SH* 36).

Fulfilling his imperialist dream in the Middle East has been among the chief objectives in Bush's political agenda. Since Iraq is "A place with a history. It was nemesis for the British in the nineteenth century. It was nemesis for the Russians in the twentieth", the Bush administration thinks it is their "turn in the twenty-first" (*SH* 22) to exert full control over it. The war has also been used to satisfy Bush's "thirst for power and oil" (*SH* 77). Finally, it was a mere



cover up of Bush's intention to side with Israel. Highlighting Bush's new strategy towards the Middle East, Condolezza Rice states:

We wish to start by sharply differentiating ourselves from the previous administration. President Clinton's attempts to broker a deal between the Israelis and Palestinians not only took up a huge amount of time. They also left this country looking weak. The president's view is that the time has come to tilt towards Israel. (*SH* 10)

Thus the target behind this war propaganda was to serve America's political agenda in the Middle East. Sharing Bush's imperialist aspirations, the British Prime Minister has manipulated the British media to convince the people of the threat that the Iraqi regime poses. Explaining why Britain must side with the Americans in propagating for the war in Iraq, Blair says: "With the Americans there is one rule. You get in early. You prove your loyalty. And that way they listen. The one thing we've learnt: if for a moment we come adrift from Washington, our influence is gone. It's gone" (*SH* 88).

In order to serve his political agenda, he asks his advisors to prepare a "Dossier . . . about the dangers of Iraq developing and using their weapons of mass destruction"



(SH 45). Although no evidence was found to condemn the Iraqi president, the British Intelligence Agencies "Released a nineteen page report entitled 'Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidations', posting it on no.10 Downing Street's website" (Fisher 409). There is no doubt that the British Intelligence in preparing the report where solid evidence is missing has followed the process of gatekeeping. The title of the report illustrates how the information that serves Blair's political agenda is filtered and selected. Moreover, by posting this report on the internet, their attempt to manipulate the media is established.

Even after the invasion has taken place, the American government continued its manipulation of the media to cover for its failure to bring freedom and justice to the oppressed Iraqis. The play concludes with a monologue in which an Iraqi exile criticizes both leaders for their failure to come up with a plan to save the Iraqis after Saddam Hussein was gone. Feeling disappointed, the Iraqi exile expresses the following:

A vacuum was created. Was it created deliberately? I cannot comprehend. They came to save us, but they had no plans. . . . And now the American dead are counted, their numbers recorded, their coffins draped in flags. How many

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Iraqis have died? How many civilians? No figure is given. Our dead are uncounted. (*SH* 119-20)

Instead of condemning Bush and Blair for their failure to bring about justice for the oppressed Iraqis, the media continued to cover up facts by glorifying the invasion. Almost like the Announcer in Ionesco's *The Leader* who makes of the headless leader a god to be worshipped, the journalist in *Stuff Happens* tries to make people believe that the invasion was carried out for the sake of freedom. Scene V opens with an angry journalist who attacks those who question the legitimacy of the invasion:

How obscene it is, how decadent, to give your attention not to the now, not to the liberation, not to the people freed, but to the relentless archaic discussion of the manner of the liberation. Was it lawful? Was it not? How was it done? What were the details of its doings? Whose views were overridden? Whose views condoned? (*SH* 14)

As shown, the journalist has tried to deviate people's attention from the "looting and pillage" (*SH* 3) that followed the invasion. His criticism of those who ignored the liberation the invasion brought to the oppressed Iraqis and questioned the manner in which it was done, underlines his attempt to mislead the public. Serving as mouthpiece of the



Bush and Blair's policy, he tries to influence the public opinion by making them believe that the war against Iraq has achieved its purpose in establishing democracy in the region. In an article entitled "*Stuff Happens* by David Hare" (2005) Janette Reinett comments on Hare's indictment of the passive role the press played. She states that

One memorable image, repeated several times, showed the press grouped together in a clump in one corner of the mammoth stage, looking like a many-headed hydra, creating both an amusing effect and a gesture of journalistic cowardice and competition, all in one image. (305)

In conclusion, Eugene Ionesco in *The Leader* and David Hare in *Stuff Happens* have shown how propaganda played an important role in shaping public opinion. In *The Leader*, Ionesco has shown how Nazi leaders through the powerful manipulation of propaganda have managed to enslave thousands of people in Romania by denying them of their individuality and logic. Belonging to the theatre of the absurd, the play condemns the dreadful power of propaganda by showing the irrational behavior of the people towards their headless leader. Similarly, the British playwright David Hare in *Stuff Happens* has set out to show how the American president George W. Bush and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair have resorted to



propaganda in order to gain legitimacy for invading Iraq. Though dealing with two different political regimes, namely, the totalitarian and the democratic, the leaders in these selected plays have followed Hitler's techniques in misinforming and shaping public opinion.

They have skillfully mastered the art of propaganda and manipulated the media to gain legitimacy for their actions.

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