

Transatlantic Miscommunication in David Hare's Drama *Stuff Happens*

Karolina Golimowska

ABSTRACT: This article addresses the transatlantic relations between the United States and Europe and specifically Great Britain in the context of post-9/11 international politics as reflected in the drama *Stuff Happens* (2004) written by British playwright David Hare. It focuses on the way recent history is performed and contextualized in dramatic form and analyzes the function and power of the *theatricalization* of historic events and particularly of finding ways to address 9/11 on a stage. Furthermore, it discusses the method of mixing parts of public speeches quoted verbatim with fiction and its effects on readers and audiences. The play addresses the struggles and fragility of international diplomacy in the aftermath of 9/11. It reflects a general skepticism towards politicians and their decisions as well as the helpless position of millions of observers who are affected by these decisions and yet feel like they have no influence. This article sees post-9/11 verbatim theater as a chance for playwright and spectators to get access to the world of politics and to take part in the process of writing transatlantic history. More generally, through the example of this play, the article aims at discussing new challenges and functions of post-9/11 theater.

KEYWORDS: verbatim theater; political theater; 9/11; David Hare; transatlantic relations

Introduction

The whole experience of being a sentient adult in the Western world in 2003 has involved being forced to stand to one side, watching in disbelief, while the governments of two English-speaking countries undertook massively unpopular policies with exactly the consequences which all intelligent bystanders foresaw—civil chaos in Iraq, the worsening of prospects for peace in the Middle East, and the inevitable undermining of international law.

(Hare, *Obedience* 185)

In his 2004 drama *Stuff Happens*, British playwright David Hare investigates the diplomatic and political processes that tragically culminated in the Iraq War of 2003. In two acts divided into twenty-four scenes, he portrays U.S.-British relations with regard to the war as a series of fatal cultural misunderstandings. As the introductory statement suggests, *Stuff Happens*

can summarily be read as Hare's response to being put into the position of a passive observer of the tragic consequences caused by decisions made by a handful of politicians and can therefore be seen as an articulation of a sentiment shared by audiences across the world. The drama premiered on September 1, 2004, at the National Theatre in London and was subsequently produced in theaters worldwide, including a slightly changed version for New York in 2006.¹ The present paper aims at analyzing the dramatic means used by Hare in order to translate a subject from public media discourse into the specific expression of dramatic text. I argue that the play, as much as the political events it represents on stage, must be seen in the context of post-9/11 tensions between the British imperial legacy and the imperial position of power claimed by the U.S.A. The mutual perception of politicians representing the two countries clings to a symbolism that keeps them from commonly addressing the issues at stake in Iraq.

Verbatim Theater—Between Reality and Fiction

The play takes its title from Donald Rumsfeld's comments on the news of Baghdad being looted as part of the American conquest after the fall of Saddam Hussein. A whole passage of Rumsfeld's speech delivered on April 11, 2003, is used in the play as an introduction to "what is going to happen here" (Hare, *Stuff Happens* 4).² In the opening scene, Rumsfeld is quoted verbatim as saying: "Stuff happens and it's untidy, and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things" (*SH* 3-4). Both the title of the play and the above quote constitute a central technique used by Hare in his play: In assembling statements and phrases from actual public speeches and from interviews with politicians, Hare creates a familiarizing effect in the audience at the same time that he categorizes his play in the tradition of documentary political theater. Hare's strategy is a form of collage of these quotes and fictional statements. *Stuff Happens* can hence be categorized as a post-9/11 verbatim

¹ The main difference between the original version and the revised one staged in the U.S. was the portrayal of Colin Powell. Hare thought he had been "too kind" to Powell regarding the degree of his complicity with Bush and the rest of the government. He changed his role "from a liberal hero to a tragic hero" (Hammond and Steward 64).

² For the reader's convenience, references to David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, 2004 ed., will be abbreviated as *SH*.

theater play—a form of documentary political theater that originated in England (Luckhurst 201).³ The term was first coined by Derek Paget in 1987 in an article which referred to British plays from the 1970s and 1980s that used material from interviews conducted extra for the purpose of writing a given theater play. The original aim of verbatim theater was to give voice to the unheard and to stage stories that might have otherwise never made it to the theater; to gain distance from main stream approaches and look at the events from a different perspective (e.g. through the eyes of the working class). The technique has again become an important tool in addressing contemporary reality after 9/11. The “theatre of the real” of the twenty-first century, as Carol Martin calls it, focuses on the global condition of “troubled epistemologies about truth, authenticity and reality” (1), aiming at producing a knowledge different from the one spread by the mass media. It has been used in order to “explain” the post-9/11 world, to build a bridge between representation and factuality. In the case of *Stuff Happens*, unlike in Hare’s *The Permanent Way* or Victoria Brittain’s and Gillian Slovo’s *Guantanamo*, parts of actual speech are not used to represent the unheard, minorities or victims. On the contrary: material that Hare works with in this play was originally designed to reach a global public; it was prepared and rehearsed to give an authoritative power to those who articulated it. Interviews that Hare makes use of were not conducted in preparation of the play—unlike the interviews assembled in the plays mentioned above and also unlike the first verbatim plays from the 1970s and 1980s. What these plays have in common, though, is the focus on representing alternative narratives and stories. This focus, specifically, constitutes the form of verbatim theater for Mary Luckhurst (216). Mixing the interview statements with fiction and bringing the assemblage on stage gives Hare the power to write an alternative history and to take part in the ongoing political discussion that might have remained inaccessible otherwise. The playwright defines his own verbatim technique as follows: “The dialogue of real people is recorded and subsequently organized by a dramatist to make a play. The process is akin to sculpture. You find the driftwood on the beach, but you carve the wood and paint it to make it art” (Hare, *Obedience* 29). *Stuff Happens* mixes parts of real public speeches and interviews with fiction, so that it

³ In my reading I follow Mary Luckhurst’s argument that places *Stuff Happens* within the tradition of verbatim theater but scholarly views on this play are divided. Donna Soto-Moretini claims that because the verbatim in *Stuff Happens* is “never off the cuff or unmediated [...] the unconstructed status of verbatim theatre is out of consideration here” (314).

becomes difficult if not impossible to distinguish between what has been said and in which context and what has its roots in Hare's imagination.

According to Will Hammond and Dan Steward, the fact that the names of the characters match the ones of existing people prompts readers and viewers to approach the play as an information source; it disguises itself as journalism (Hammond and Steward 10; see also Rokem 7). The audience is led to expect veracity rather than verisimilitude. However, what constitutes theater for Hare is metaphor (*Obedience* 27), something that clearly distinguishes it from journalism whose primary aim is to inform rather than interpret, make meaning of the events or arrange them in new settings to achieve a desired effect on the audience. Verbatim theater "does what journalism fails to do" says Hare in an interview with Will Hammond (Hammond and Steward 62)—or by definition cannot do, namely to imaginatively step into the characters' worlds and thoughts without giving up the claim to veracity. Hare differentiates between character speech and asides, using audience addresses made up of the non-fictional characters' phrases, even if the context is slightly different, and imagined private conversations between the characters, respectively. In this way, the element of the unexpected defamiliarizes the audience expectations and seems appropriate to a play dealing with recent history. In the "Author's Note" to the 2006 revised edition of *Stuff Happens*, Hare writes: "The events within [the play] have been authenticated from multiple sources, both private and public. What happened happened. Nothing in the narrative is knowingly untrue" (*Stuff Happens*, rev. repr. 2006). The characters in Hare's play who carry the names of real politicians speak in a mixture of real and fictitious voices. Hare contrasts these characters with the figures of external narrators called "Actors" who do not have this double identity and with five fictional characters introduced as a British journalist, a New Labour Politician, a Brit in New York, a Palestinian academic and an Iraqi exile. These figures regularly intervene in order to provide additional information or an opinion on a discussed issue and thus are given authority over the other characters. Their power to intervene gives them control over the events in the play. These meta-narrators stand between the figures of politicians and the audience. By way of creating a sense of alienation or detachment from the actual events (as in the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*) that their presence evokes, they bring coherence to the (hi)story and put the events into perspective. They certainly constitute one aspect of the metaphorical in Hare's drama. They provide the spectators with a cold, all-

knowing view on the events that are yet to come. They do not try to suggest alternative histories but they do point out the importance of coincidence and randomness in the course of the events. They ask the politicians on the stage difficult questions and expect precise answers and no excuses. Their inquiries are based on the information they could have from the media which brings them close to the audience. Mary Luckhurst refers to these figures as “voices of conscience” (213) that regularly enter the lives of the politicians and put them under pressure. These outsiders always appear individually, rather than as a group, but throughout the whole play their voices form a chorus of outside commentators.

Writing History

In many of his previous plays, Hare focused on individuals who were not involved in politics. He was interested in their perception of history and its impact on their lives. Showing the world as seen through the eyes of these characters, he attempted to provide an alternative history to what he remembers as the “phoney and corrupting” version he was taught at school (Hare, *Obedience* 121). In contrast, *Stuff Happens* revolves around powerful political leaders, public figures who are supposed to represent positions and attitudes of whole countries and who are responsible for the consequences of their political decisions on private lives. In the vein of his previous plays, however, Hare portrays these public figures as individuals who get moody, hungry, who go bowling, have music preferences, are religious, etc. He thus achieves a representation which shows the fragility, unpredictability and contingency of a history made by individuals whose intellectual shape is influenced by various trivial factors. Historical events are demystified and the line between the world’s history shaped by political decisions and the private lives of millions of individuals becomes very vague.

To a large extent the action of the drama takes place in rooms behind closed doors. Similar to realist plays like Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (1900) or *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), Hare makes sure that the connection between the world-out-there and the behind-the-scenes becomes evident in his play. In *Stuff Happens* history sweeps through these closed spaces, seemingly isolated from the rest of the world. David Hare understands himself as a political playwright and as such is “defined by a sense of what might be, as well as of what is; that argument between what we could be and what we are (...) which effectively means a sense

of history" (*Faber Playwrights* 25-26). The text is, according to Hare a history play, "which happens to centre on very recent history" ("Author's Note," *Stuff Happens*, rev. repr. 2006).

Often referred to as a chronicler or witness of our times, Hare unscrupulously mixes documentation and imagination; what he "believes to have happened" ("Playwright David Hare") informs the scenes staged as taking place behind closed doors. He uses the strategy to express a critical stance toward the world's leaders and to reflect post-9/11 sentiments in Great Britain. Additionally, the characters who are not involved in political processes in this play are used as supporting voices in articulating the discomfort with decisions arrived at by their democratically chosen leaders. They display a recognizable detachment owing partly to the fact that they do not get to know the decision makers as vulnerable and often confused individuals.

The discrepancy between the politicians in the play and their real counterparts' public image results in humorous effects achieved through incongruity deriving from the slightly different and often contradicting images. Showing the gap between what is intended to be said and what comes across is, according to Hare, the power of theater, of the staged interpretations of facts:

I would suggest crudely that one of the reasons for the theatre's possible authority, and for its recent general drift towards politics, is its unique suitability to illustrating an age in which men's ideals and men's practice bear no relation to each other [...] The theatre is the best way of showing the gap between what is said and what is seen to be done [...]. (Hare, *Obedience* 115)

According to Freddie Rokem, we only seem to become aware of historic events when they are recapitulated. We need a discourse to reflect, address and consequently perceive the world we live in as history. This is what a theater play can offer: "an organized repetition of the past" that puts it in an aesthetic frame (Rokem xi). The events are put together, are no longer fragmented and form an entity, a "story," a chain of processes. Since Hare refers to a past that is not remote, there is no distance from the present reality and no possibility to look at the events from a different, detached, unemotional perspective. His past is still very closely connected to the present, it is impossible to change its representation radically without the audience noticing and evolving the feeling of misrepresentation. Spectators become again witnesses of the events they have experienced not so long ago. In a theater they be-

come a community, the play offers them participation in the process of a collective re-experience which they have been looking for; or, “community and communion,” as Mary Luckhurst puts it (210).

Transatlantic Relations

The play interprets the Iraq war as mainly a power struggle between the United States and Great Britain in which the attacked country appears secondary. The Iraqis are put into the role of imaginary enemies in the center of the power competition. Hare portrays the United States as a country powerful and angry enough to do “what it damn well pleases” (Hare, *Obedience* 208), that has the feeling of being exempt from the course of world history. Great Britain turns out to be its junior partner whose primary task is to do the justifying and explaining in front of the global public. In quoting Stanley Kubrick’s statement that “[l]arge states often behave like gangsters while smaller states often behave like prostitutes” (Hare, *Obedience* 208) and bitterly acknowledging that “we [the Brits] may at least console ourselves that we have descended to a point where we are more whore than racketeer,” the playwright challenges attitudes possibly rooted in an American exceptionalism which is used to legitimize policies that allow the U.S. to act against the stance of the United Nations. In the play however, Hare’s position is not transparent: he does not want to be seen as a spokesman for either of the parties. Introducing independent critical voices from both sides of the Atlantic, he shows a strong disappointment with what he considers a dubious cooperation and stresses his distance from both U.S. and British governments. He also questions the independence and hence sense of British politics in a statement delivered by the character Blair talking to Campbell: “I promised the British people: no war without the UN [...] There’s one rule. With the Americans there’s 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, if even for a moment we come adrift from Washington, our influence is gone. It’s gone!” (88). All the political and diplomatic processes together with their consequences are shown through a close study of (mostly male) individuals—politicians of highest ranks. The 44 characters of the play (36 in the revised version for the New York production in 2006) are all well known and could be divided into three major groups: the U.S. officials surrounding George W. Bush and his War Cabinet; representatives of the British government, and French politicians.

Most of the characters serve to form the political scene for the decisions of the front players and do not undergo a closer study or analysis. We only know who they are and what their political functions are because we are familiar with their names. It is the leaders and the tensions between them that Hare really focuses on and where he directs the dramatic attention.

All the politicians are introduced as “the actors [...] the men and women who will play parts in the opening drama of the new century” (*SH* 8). Consistently, the world in *Stuff Happens* becomes a stage; politicians are actors who perform the opening scenes of the twenty-first century drama. Reality becomes theater and theater becomes reality. The beginning of this new century, as Hare inscenates it, marked by the events of 9/11, requires an appropriate theatrical response: one in which the real and the imagined intermingle and where an individual can never be trusted. Everything can be questioned or reinterpreted. Nothing can be taken for granted; the real seems absurd, random and inconsistent. No norms or definitions seem appropriate or useful. These sentiments are being addressed in the very first sentences of the play. An Actor says: “The Inevitable is what will seem to happen to you purely by chance. The Real is what will strike you as really absurd. Unless you are certain you are dreaming, it is certainly a dream of your own. Unless you exclaim—‘There must be some mistake’—you must be mistaken” (*SH* 1). What follows is a presentation of the characters and their backgrounds enacted by two Actors and a Journalist. They go back to the official end of the Vietnam War in 1975 when the fall of Saigon proved for the first time that “there are limits to American power” (*SH* 4). The Actors let the figures speak for themselves but also provide some additional information. For instance, Colin Powell is described as “a serving soldier, schooled in obedience” (*SH* 4). They act as chorus-like outside narrators who also provide the so-called “interventions,” which David Hare explains as his method of dealing with a subject that is controversial and well known. The audience knows or believes to know the processes that led to the war in Iraq, so what the play addresses are not the events themselves but people’s reactions to them on both sides of the Atlantic. The technique of employing interventions recalls the ancient Greek theater, which provided a forum for the audience to intervene, comment, and get actively involved in the staged narrative. Going back to this tradition within a very modern theatrical construct is an example of what Richard Gray in *After the Fall* calls “hybridization” of theatrical means. He claims that one of

the consequences of 9/11 was to “democratize and/or hybridize art” in general and that post-9/11 drama⁴ became, apart from being a form of therapy, a democratic forum (Gray 149). This corresponds to Rokem’s idea of performing history as an attempt to fully understand its consequences for the present. In other words, to explain the present through staging the past.

The last character to be presented by the Actor to the audience is George W. Bush, “a snappish young man, seeking his fortune in the oil-rich Permian Basin of West Texas” (SH 8) who also speaks for himself: “My faith frees me. [...] You know I had a drinking problem. Right now I should be in a bar in Texas, not in the Oval Office. There is only one reason I am in the Oval Office, and not a bar. I found God” (SH 8-9). Next, Hare inserts a major flash forward and presents George W. Bush as the president of the U.S. who quite accidentally found himself in the White House and who hardly ever says anything: “I’m the commander—see, I don’t need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the President” (SH 9).

Hare juxtaposes Bush with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair who is presented as the European counterpart and who displays a certain condescension toward George W. Bush. Although the play makes use of humor and light sarcasm, it generally avoids the tendency of making fun of Bush, of showing him as a stupid leader. Instead, Hare takes Bush and his actions seriously and shows him as a cunning Shakespearian figure who is obsessed with power and does not fear or try to avoid war. It is a very important message of *Stuff Happens* that since the consequences of Bush’s decisions are serious, his actions must also be taken seriously. Whoever fails to acknowledge or recognize this relation, loses his ground and becomes ridiculous, just like Tony Blair in this drama. Bush is aware of his influence and uses it to manipulate and blackmail people around him. This is exactly what happens to Tony Blair and also to Colin Powell: they both become politically outmaneuvered. The U.S. president has a sense of humor and can be cynical: “You know, you’ve got to remember, every speech

⁴ Birgit Däwes identifies 46 dramas written after and about 9/11. Only six plays were published outside the U.S. Hare’s *Stuff Happens* is one of the two published in Great Britain, the other one being *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom* by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo published in 2004 (Däwes 425).

is now 'the speech of my life'. I've had about six of those from my trusted advisers. So I'm immune to the 'speech of your life' stuff" (SH 65).

The play leads us chronologically through the events of 9/11 to the diplomatic moves that eventually lead to the war on terror. The terrorists attacks of September 11th are shown as a fairly dry collection of medial accounts of speech fragments, declarations and a headline of the French newspaper *Le Monde* stating that now (after 9/11) we are all Americans. Also here the report is interrupted several times by narrating 'interventions' performed by an Actor. They provide brief encyclopedic definitions and explanatory remarks.

In the next scene readers and spectators see the members of the War Cabinet that was set up on September 15th. They are all at Camp David, all in their casual clothes. They start with a prayer, then they discuss invading Iraq and they disagree over the course of action. They are portrayed as a bizarre crowd resembling a dysfunctional family trying to set up their daily agenda. Their meetings are interrupted by meals since "comfort food," as Bush calls it, and domestic calm are very important (SH 22). Caring about domestic calm and good food comes across as quite absurd in the context of the decisions that are about to be made. The War Cabinet members tell us exactly who they are and what they think, which makes them vulnerable but also approachable. They agree on attacking Iraq to state an example in the War on Terror, and because it is "do-able," as Wolfowitz says in the play (SH 22). Like in a game where each next move has to be agreed upon, the cabinet members discuss the decision to go to war matter-of-factly, as if it were a trivial every-day matter. However, the decision-making process is just an illusion for Bush alone eventually decides and thus renders the actual discussion in the play a pure formality and farce. The absurdity of the decision-making is reflected in the following brief exchange:

Bush: Huh.

Rumsfeld: I like what you said earlier, sir. A war on terror. That's good. That's vague.

Cheney: It's good.

Rumsfeld: That way we can do anything. (SH 24)

When afterwards Bush meets Blair in Texas to talk about Iraq before they go to a press conference, Blair refuses to support an invasion without a UN resolution and honest diplomacy. He justifies his decision in a long statement, which Bush concludes with a brief: "I'll think about it" (SH 41). On his return to London, Blair is unsure of what has been agreed. This is an

example of Bush being a cunning character who can manipulate and surprise Blair. His seeming communicational incompetence makes him strong and dangerous.

At this stage of the play Colin Powell becomes a crucial figure. A Vietnam War veteran, he is the only person in the War Cabinet who supports Tony Blair's desire for diplomacy. Powell is very skeptical towards Bush's plan and criticizes it, wishing "his country was less arrogant" (SH 53).

Bush: We need to show these people that we mean business.

Powell: The Roman Empire. I'm familiar with the analogy. The Romans would always go out of their way to make an announcement: 'You are now dealing with the Roman Empire'. So if you pricked a senator in Rome, if you just pricked him through his toga with a pin, then Roman soldiers would seek out the village you came from [...] and they would kill all your family and burn down your house just to make a point. But Sir, we're not Romans. And last time I looked at the constitution, we were still a republic, not an empire. (SH 51)

Bush finally agrees to discuss the resolution with the UN officials and sends Powell to talk to them. Dominique de Villepin, Foreign Minister of France is skeptical about the sudden shift towards international diplomacy: "Call us oversensitive, but some of us find it hard to believe you're now getting wholeheartedly behind the idea of international law" (SH 69). De Villepin describes the world outside of America referring primarily to Europe as a rejected lover in order to explain the mistrust and skepticism: "[N]ow it's one o'clock in the morning and you're coming to our door with a bunch of flowers and whiskey on your breath. You can see why some of us are feeling just a little bit cautious" (SH 70).

This corresponds to the idea that Paul Smith comes up with in his essay "Why 'We' lovehate 'You,'" introducing a master-slave dialectic to address transatlantic relations in the 21st century. Smith claims that European powers, rights and obligations as 'slaves' are to no longer love and to remain ambivalent towards the "narcissist" as he calls the U.S., obsessed with its imperial aspirations. This very strong and controversial metaphor is meant to show, similarly to Hare's drama, the European position as subordinate to the U.S.

Speaking in parliament, British MP Simpson uses another comparison to address the transatlantic relations, which mirrors Smith's argument:

Bush will hit Iraq in much the same way that a drunk will hit a bottle—to satisfy his thirst for power and oil. I must tell the Prime Minister that the role of a friend in such circumstances is not to pass the drunk the bottle! (SH 77)

And finally we are exposed to what Hare presents as the quintessence of European perception of the U.S. after 9/11 and its aggressive politics of revenge—a reaction that Doris Lessing in an article published in 2002 called “excessive to outsiders” (53). In the play it comes across as a statement of symbolic importance:

Brit in New York: ‘America changed’. That’s what we’re told. ‘On September 11th everything changed.’ ‘If you’re not American, you can’t understand.’

The infantile psychobabble of popular culture is grafted opportunistically onto America’s politics. [...] If the principle of international conduct is now to be that you may go against anyone you like on the grounds that you’ve been hurt by somebody else, does that apply to everyone? Or just to America?

On September 11th, America changed. Yes. It got much stupider. (SH 93)

The audience also gets to hear some very critical statements coming from the other side of the Atlantic, as if Hare wanted to achieve a balance and force the spectators to take into consideration both perspectives before taking sides:

Rumsfeld: Europeans are always more worried about how exactly America reacts to the threat of Saddam than they are about Saddam himself. Man’s coming at you with a knife. All they’re worrying about is which hand we use to take it away. (SH 99)

Because what can you say about these people in Europe except that they live their lives under the American umbrella? Every time it rains they come running for shelter. And yet they still think that they’re entitled to say, “Hey you’re not holding that umbrella right.” Or more often, “I want a share of that umbrella.” (SH 101)

All the voices on transatlantic perspectives, a Brit in New York, a Journalist, British MP Simpson, are partly quoted verbatim from real speeches but put into an invented context, so they are of course representative to some extent but primarily symbolic. As I argued in this paper, singular voices of unknown individuals are very important for the whole play. They represent collective identities that always grow from a common perception and understanding of their specific historical past and differ slightly on both sides of the Atlantic.

Conclusion

Stuff Happens shows that the U.S.-European or more specifically U.S.-British relations are far more important to each party than the country and people they are attacking. The U.S. is portrayed as a stubborn giant whose good conscience is Colin Powell. According to the play,

going to war has a symbolic dimension, because it is a way of proving the exceptionalism of American power, if mainly to American politicians who seem desperate for a confirmation coming from the outside. The notion of exceptionalism is being questioned and ridiculed. The drama shows that consequences and responsibility are beyond the desire to be exceptional. None of the individuals portrayed by Hare, except for Powell, cares about the soldiers who will sacrifice their lives. Neither do they seem to care about the countless Iraqi civilians who will suffer most tragically from an American invasion. War seems to be merely a necessary next step in a game, more virtual than real. Political leaders in this drama are only playing, their intentions are being questioned and their figures infantilized.

Transatlantic relations in *Stuff Happens*, just like all other political decisions, as the play suggests, rely on a few, portrayed as almost random individuals of various backgrounds. Their prejudices and fears derive from their upbringing and socialization in a given political and cultural context of an either European (British or French) or U.S.-American setting. What can make a difference is the general mutual openness in perception on both sides of the Atlantic and the discourse created in order to address it. What is also important for understanding the reasons for miscommunication and failed cooperation are the voices coming from outside of the political circle, like the “Brit in New York” in the quoted passage. They present the mainstream opinion, propagated and constantly repeated by the media.

David Hare has written both a historic pageant and a drama about the frustrations of power and the limits of diplomacy. His play criticizes and satirizes the egoism and self-centrism of the United States and Great Britain without taking sides. The play depicts how people of these two countries share a language but keep misunderstanding one another on so many other levels which is personified in the Bush-Blair (mis)coupling. They are so preoccupied with their reciprocal relation that they tend to overlook the rest of the world or use it as a tool in their own interest. This ties in with the initial statements by Hare that address the helplessness of the observer. It is the first and only play that shows the U.S.-British relations in the context of post-9/11 politics as a cultural communication problem with fatal consequences for the Iraqi people.

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