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### Windows into Life-Worlds: Blogs and Conclusion

#### Fear and two blogs

Often the most knowledgeable informants about relatively distant countries and cultures in the UK and USA are émigrés from those countries. This is understandable; they can be expected to have a close awareness of both their countries of origin and domicile, some degree of allegiance to both, and a stake in mediating between them. And indeed an 'insider' perspective, which an émigré informant is likely to have, is regarded as valuable in cultural and scholarly works. For instance, the perspectives of ethnographers from within the culture being studied, or 'autoethnography', are often received as more authentic than those from a different culture engaging in field research (on this, particularly in relation to literary narratives, see Buzard 2003 and 2005; Ellis 2009; Pratt 1992). In addition to possessing an insider perspective, émigré informants may derive advantages from their outside position unavailable to those within the country of origin: they may have better resources at their command, the benefits of a comparative perspective, or the freedom to engage with areas which are unpopular or denied within the country of origin. However, there are also obvious problems with uncritically accepting what such informants say. To some extent, these are problems which may apply to any insider perspective (and those cited above have debated this apropos autoethnographers' claims to 'authenticity'): for example, an inside position is not necessarily unbiased, and could variously distort observations in terms of internal political or social allegiances. Beyond these, the émigré's position as informant is apt to arouse suspicion on other grounds. Her migration might be motivated, for instance, by dissatisfactions with her country of origin which are not necessarily shared by those who live there – and these dissatisfactions may well colour the kind of information

she provides. Since her livelihood and economic interests are within the adopted country of domicile, she might feel called upon to subscribe or be pressured into subscribing to attitudes and prejudices that prevail there. However well-informed she may feel about her country of origin, the fact of domicile at a distance is not a discountable factor: inevitably, the information she provides will gradually lose touch with the experience of living in that country, will not be borne upon and conditioned by the textures of everyday life there, will be given to generalizing in ways which look unrealistic for the citizens living there. In literature and criticism addressed to postcolonial and diasporic contexts such issues have caused numerous quarrels: émigré authors have occasionally been at odds with those who live in their countries of origin, émigré postcolonial critics in Western academies and postcolonial critics within postcolonial countries often regard each other with suspicion (both sides feel they occupy a moral high ground).

As Bush's 'war on terror' and the invasion of Iraq unfolded, literature about the Middle East that circulated in the UK and USA was variously discussed along the above lines. A spate of well-publicized 'literary fiction' and memoirs (sometimes balanced on the boundary between those) by émigré writers made their way to the market, those about Iran and Afghanistan circulating most widely: for example, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003); Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite-Runner* (2003); Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* (Vol. 1, 2003, first French issue in 2000); Christopher de Bellaigue's (whose Iranian connections are very close) *In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs* (2004). These generated an anxious debate on their veracity and the effect they had on, particularly, American perceptions of the Middle East in the invasion context. An essay by Hamid Dabashi entitled 'Native Informers and the Making of American Empire' (2006) observed, with Nafisi's book in view, that such memoirs served the invasion ethos by cultivating collective amnesia and selective memory, and Syed Mohammed Marandi (2008) charted the various inaccuracies of Nafisi's book. Fatemeh Keshavarz's book-length study *Jasmine and Stars* (2007) discerned the features of a New Orientalism for American consumption in such books, at a time when, 'since 9/11, knowing about the Muslim Middle East is not a luxury, it is a matter of life and death' (p. 2). In the November 2009 issue of the *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Coeli Fitzpatrick and Melissa Lim argued respectively the cases for and against these books. Fitzpatrick confirmed that, 'these works function as active producers of meaning within American society in that they take up previous Orientalist assumptions about the Middle East and Muslims, giving these assumptions rejuvenated force with authorship by natives and near

natives' (p. 244); while Lim found 'mitigating circumstances' (p. 261) for them, primarily with reference to their gender and sexual politics.

This debate was primarily about books addressed to Iran and circulating in the USA, at a time – following the invasion of Iraq – when it seemed to many that Iran may well be the next target. But literary works by émigré Iraqi authors, in various languages, had also played their part in the book market of the invasion period – I come to some of these in the next section. In English, a less-noted novel by Khalid Kishtainy, *Tomorrow is Another Day: A Tale of Saddam's Baghdad* (2003), appeared in the UK. This dark satire is set in Baghdad during the Iraq–Iran war of the 1980s, and describes the picaresque adventures of Muhammad Zabib after his release from Abu Ghraib prison, where he had been incarcerated for his communist convictions. He starts up a successful business of marrying war widows for a generous reward (offered by a government decree), finds himself forcibly recruited to the war, starts up various lucrative enterprises after the war (gallows, mobile mosques, illegal migrants), and eventually finds his way to Europe and settles there with his wives. In the last lines of the novel Mohammad discovers a wholly new sort of freedom as émigré: 'for the first time I feel secure and free from worry. No one will come and knock at my door with a rifle at dawn. No one will come and take from me all that I may or may not have and leave me with nothing I can call my own other than the clothes I stand up in' (Kishtainy 2003, pp. 198–9); and he ends contemplating living 'the rest of our lives off the bounteous munificence of good old imperialism!' (p. 199). The picaresque novel, true to its form, succeeds in presenting Iraq – in an amusing way – as a thoroughly corrupt and brutalized society under Saddam Hussein's arbitrary and repressive regime. It also succeeds in demonstrating that this corruption is not merely top-down but fully assimilated at ground level: persons are not merely obliged by circumstances to be corrupt, they cultivate corruption unabashed themselves; all are compliant subjects of the brutality and hypocrisy generated by the state, and complicit with the state; and the blanket moral bankruptcy of the whole goes hand in hand with the unmitigated moral bankruptcy of every individual, without exception. The only realization of the pressure of repression becomes possible from the outside, when Iraqi protagonists leave the country and look back (and in the process export corruption).

*Tomorrow is Another Day* appeared in September 2003. This picture of the comprehensively bleak environment in Iraq under Saddam Hussein – sustained from top to bottom, from state to individual, from macroscopic whole to microscopic part – had already been widely circulated before and during the invasion in the USA and UK, and was

familiar. Perhaps that is why Kishtainy's novel received little notice. This picture was cited as the ethical justification for invasion, and sought to convey the terror which grips *every aspect* of life in Iraq under Hussein's regime: the unavoidable hold of terror on every individual and family, who suffer without reprieve. One of the infamous UK government dossiers to make the case for invasion in December 2002, *Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses*, had set the tone. It was introduced with the words: 'Iraq is a terrifying place to live. People are in constant fear of being denounced as opponents of the regime. They are encouraged to report on the activities of family and neighbours' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002, p. 4); and concluded by noting the contributions made to it by refugees and claiming to be 'a faithful representation of what ordinary Iraqis face in their everyday lives' (p. 20). Reports supporting the ethical case for invasion reiterated this picture variously. A March 2003 *Newsweek* report observed: 'It is one of the last truly totalitarian states, in the tradition of Germany under Adolf Hitler or the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, whom Saddam is said to admire greatly. [...] Throughout Iraq one is surrounded by what Hannah Arendt, writing of the Nazis, called the "banality of evil"' (Dickey et al. 2003, p. 35). Incidentally, the quotation from Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial in 1961 (Arendt 1963/1964) was off the point. Misconstrued quotations were fairly common in journalism on the invasion. Arendt's observation was of the banality she perceived in Eichmann's person and psyche contrasted with the enormity of his crimes during the trial – it wasn't really about the 'banalization of anti-Semitic violence' in Nazi Germany. The latter has to do with a habitual acceptance of violence in a society, which this report was actually trying to get at. Arendt's observation on the 'banality of evil' was more aptly evoked during Saddam Hussein's trials in 2005 and 2006. Anyway, along similar lines a BBC report of April 2003 by Stephen Sackur observed: 'Saddam's Iraq was like Stalin's Soviet Union – a republic of fear in which truth-telling was punishable by death. Even within families there could be no trust, no honesty. You could never, ever, be sure who was being blackmailed, squeezed, by the mukhabarat, the secret police' (Sackur 2003). The comprehensive depth of terror here was also captured by a resonant phrase, 'republic of fear', in this instance more meaningfully applied. It was the title of the émigré Iraqi academic in the USA, Kanan Makiya's book (first published under the pseudonym Samir al-Khalil in 1989, reissued 1998), detailing how under Hussein's regime 'horror stories became the norm inside a hitherto ordinary developing country' (Makiya 1998, p. xi).

This picture of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, so effectively characterized for the invasion and testified by émigré Iraqi writers (whose integrity there is no reason at all to doubt), is easiest put into perspective by drawing attention to some distinctions made in rigorous examinations of such repressive conditions. The notion of a ‘banalization of violence’, which I have mentioned in passing, has been much examined for various contexts where violence has been rife and has come to be a key instrument of control. With colonial African experiences in view, Achille Mbembe has formulated this succinctly as the form of violence that is:

[...] designed to ensure the authority’s maintenance, spread, and permanence. Falling well short of what is properly called ‘war,’ it recurred again and again in the most banal and ordinary situations. It then crystallized, through a gradual accumulation of numerous acts and rituals – in short, played so important a role in everyday life that it ended up constituting the central cultural *imaginary* that the state shared with society, and thus had an authenticating and reiterating function. (Mbembe 2001, p. 25)

The significant point in this formulation is in the emphasis Mbembe puts on ‘*imaginary*’: violence becomes an active agent in the manner in which government and governed understand each other and envision their expectations of each other in an everyday way, or are constructed and reconstructed daily with regard to each other – hence ‘*imaginary*’ (in the psyche of such a society). This does not mean that each and every person involved in this situation regards it as normal, or accepts this situation without a resistant thought, or is gripped by unthinking passive voiceless fear. That would render such a condition unalterable from within, and, with Mbembe’s view in mind, render decolonization movements (for instance) inexplicable. The question is always how far can everyday resistant feelings and fear of the pervasive everyday violence be contained by the ‘*imaginary*’ shared between state and society, and when could it become unacceptable and implode. From *within* such a situation, that always depends on the complexities of everyday life: there are usually let-outs in everyday life from the imposed ‘banalization of violence’ where the everyday fears and resistant misgivings can be assuaged or forgotten; the textures of individual pleasures and sufferings remain variegated, and so indeed are loyalties and suspicions. At worst, the response to such a ‘banalization of violence’ could be a sort of habituation of fear. But that too is a fragile thing, and not a one-dimensional fear that subsumes the consciousness and makes it unthinking and inarticulate – more, it seems

to me, it is in line with what Michael Taussig described as a 'doubleness of social being':

a state of doubleness of social being in which one moves in bursts between somehow accepting the situation as normal, only to be thrown into a panic or shocked into disorientation by an event, a rumour, a sight, something said, or not said – something that even while it requires the normal in order to make its impact, destroys it. [...] people like you and me close their eyes to it, in a manner of speaking, but suddenly an unanticipated event occurs, perhaps a dramatic or poignant or ugly one, and the normality of the abnormal is shown for what it is. Then it passes away, terror as usual, in a staggering of position that lends itself to survival as well as despair and macabre horror. (Taussig 1992, p. 18)

The possibility and impossibility of normality, a horizon of imagined normality, in other words, shadows everyday life under a repressive and violent political order, and in its interstices critical thinking and human intelligence remain always active. The comprehensive grip of a politics of violence doesn't mean that the political subject becomes uniformly fearful and passive, and doesn't mean that everyday lives lose their complex textures and assume one taut colour of fear. Moreover, different classes and different occupations in a repressive society have quite different views on its condition, even if repressive violence is endemic. The simplistic view of a repressive society being coloured by fear constantly and uniformly and daily can, however, seem plausible from an extrinsic position.

The Iraqi émigré's account of Saddam Hussein's regime – such as Kanan Makiya's or, in a different way, Khalid Kishtainy's – might have been truthful in essence and detail, but it was removed from and removed the complex textures of everyday life *within* Iraq. Also, some such accounts were perhaps not devoid of political vested interests and over-determination of personal experiences. In the American and British dispensations where invasion was programmatically lobbied for, these were received not simply as truthful in essence and details, but as comprehensive characterizations of a uniformly fear-ridden and victimized population in passive submission – to the core of individual and domestic and everyday existence. In the USA and UK, it seems to me, a perception of a population paralysed by fear in Iraq was promoted which comprehensively wiped out the critical intelligence of Iraqi subjects. This erasure was certainly accepted by the pro-invasion lobby, and actually also

among many who were opposed to the invasion. Such erasure could be regarded as a particular way of regarding Iraqis in general under Saddam Hussein as, somehow, *different* from – or *other* than – (free and democratic) Americans and British citizens because of their social and political condition: different by dint of a psyche that has been moulded by repression and everyday violence. Both pro- and sometimes anti-invasion proponents sought to reach across this barrier of otherness: the former by their generosity in liberating them from Hussein; the latter by their virtuousness in trying to protect them from Bush and Blair. The sense of a deeply traumatized and paralysed society seemed to be supported by reliable Iraqi émigré informants in the USA and UK. To a great extent the invasion and occupation was conducted ostensibly on the back of Iraqis abroad: for instance, in the puppet Iraqi Governing Council during the occupation period, 10 of the 25 variously appointed council members had been abroad for significant periods before the invasion, and of the 12 persons who held the rotating presidency 8 had been exiles or émigrés.

Under these circumstances the appearance of two blogs from Iraq made something of a stir during the invasion period: Salam Pax's blog started appearing from September 2002 and continued through the build-up to the undertaking of the invasion, and the book published from this, *The Baghdad Blog* (2003), covered up to June 2003; Riverbend started blogging on Pax's pages before setting up her own, and covered almost the entire occupation phase from August 2003 – the first published book based on these (2005) reached to September 2004, and another volume has been published since (2006). Both have continued to write blogs, and – apart from the published books – their blogs have passed into other media: Salam Pax made four 15-minute reports for the BBC after Saddam Hussein's fall, which have been collected and produced on DVD (2006); Riverbend's blog has been turned into theatre performances, by the Six Figures Theatre Company, New York, in March 2005, and in other countries. In terms of the above observations, the effect these blogs had could be summarized in three points. First, these came with evidence of articulateness and critical intelligence which undermined any presumption of otherness or difference, or of victimized paralysis. Second, they constructed and conveyed an impression of everyday life and individual lives in Baghdad which was as complex and irreducible as everyday life anywhere, and not captured by the monotones of pervasive fear. And third, they traced an ever-intensifying path of everyday violence and fear in Baghdad as being actuated *by* the invasion, and at every point refused to let this violence become banalized or the resulting fear to become habitual (and that undermined the preconception of the Iraqi people's

psyche as having become deeply habituated to violence and fear under the prolonged regime of Saddam Hussein).

Each of these effects, or rather the cumulative effect along these three lines intertwined, could be understood in terms of the literary form of the blog. Blogs (digital diaries) such as these are, of course, as much a literary form as published texts of diaries and journals are now regarded as being, and yet their electronic character renders them distinct from the conventional diary in ways which are of moment here. I trace the literary qualities of the diary generally, and their distinctiveness in the electronic form of blogs, in describing the singular three-fold effects of Pax's and Riverbend's writings in the invasion period here.

The conventional diary seems to present the process of the diarist's writing about her life as she lives it. The diary develops with the unpredictability of everyday life, touches upon this thought or that experience or such and such observation of the diarist as it occurs, without overall predetermination or closure. Since there isn't a holistic design in the diary, the consciousness of the diarist – her persona – seems to provide the unifying thread. These are consequently the two poles of the diary form: on the one hand, it seems to provide an ongoing record of the process of living; on the other hand, it thereby conveys the character (self) of the diarist. From a literary perspective these are both textual constructions. By that I do not mean that the diarist's existence is doubtful or the veracity of her record questionable (those can be checked), but that the diary form itself – in its layout and structures and expressions as a text – creates a powerful impression of the reality of the diarist and the veracity of the record. The unpredictable day-by-day process of the diary text *resonates* with, so to speak, the complexity of living from day to day; and the necessity of a unifying consciousness to hold the diary entries together *conveys* a strong sense of the integrity of the diarist. Since the conventional diary is usually read retrospectively, probably in a published form (as the books from Pax's and Riverbend's blogs may be), there might be some suspicion of its having been moulded or adjusted with hindsight. The electronic form of the blog adds further emphasis to the impression of everyday reality and the diarist's integrity. The blog enables the intertwining of the process of writing with the process of reading, i.e. as the blog is written piece by piece it is read piece by piece. So the formal impression of a process of writing in the diary form is more than an impression in the blog form: here the process of writing and the process of reading *do* unfold side by side. Further, not only do they unfold side by side, writing and reading interact with each other – readers can post comments and bloggers can respond to readers



in their blogs, so that the blog becomes a dynamic communicative space, and the processive blog text is formulated somewhere between a process of writers and readers writing to and reading each other. The interactiveness of readers and writers of such electronic texts has been of considerable interest to literary theorists, who have consequently sought to modify conventional notions of authorship, readership and texts (e.g. see Bolter 1991, p. 121, on 'interactive fiction', and Gaggi 1997, p. 122, on 'interactive literature'). Moreover, readers' sense of the integrity of the blogger as a person is also sharpened beyond the possibilities of the diarist. Bloggers often announce their constructedness by assuming fake blogging identities (as Pax and Riverbend do, both pseudonyms), but capitalize on the persuasiveness of their texts *and* their interactions with readers to construct themselves gradually too (it is like reader and blogger living together in cyberspace). The blog therefore comes with a particularly powerful sense of both the blogger's presence and of the everyday life presented, along the lines of the conventional diary but more emphatically so. In brief, as Campbell and Kelly (2009) have put it in their discussion of two other bloggers in 'post-Saddam Iraq', blogs provide 'a real-time, unfolding, reflexive, and often interactive window into particular life-worlds' (p. 22). To understand the effects of Salam Pax's and Riverbend's blogs in the invasion period, the form of the blog needs to be kept firmly in view. The books published on their basis are a reduction of the blog form to the conventional diary form, and shadow the blog form inadequately. The effects are because of the blog form.

The above observations are particularly relevant here because both blogs were in fact received unusually sceptically. The perception in the USA and UK of the otherness of Iraqis in Iraq, of the passivity moulded by repression under Hussein's government and simply of political and cultural distance, was such that the verve and accessibility of these blogs simply seemed implausible. Not only were they approached sceptically, in many quarters they caused resentment. The critical thinking they evidenced seemed to undermine the doubtful but acceptable ethical basis (leaving aside the obvious mendacities) of the invasion, that terror-struck Iraqis needed to be rescued from tyranny – these both *said* or *argued* they didn't need rescuing and *sounded* like they didn't, without making any concessions to Saddam Hussein's regime. Every sort of doubt was aired by readers. Their command of the English language seemed suspicious, and both explained. There were speculations about which agency these blogs were propaganda for – 'Which is sexier? To be a CIA put-up or a propaganda ploy?', asked Pax (2003, p. 25). Both received numerous comments and emails which were described by

Riverbend as 'full of criticism, cynicism, and anger' (2005, p. 10). And this is where the blog form came into play. Much of both blogs were responses to these, writing back to lack of information with information, to mindless abuse with satire, to points of debate with arguments. The blogs were largely conversations: of these bloggers with those responding to their observations and with other bloggers and with each other and with, importantly, news reportage which formed a common backdrop for participants in the blogosphere on all sides. In the books based on these blogs numerous interlocutors are implied and shadowed within Pax's and Riverbend's texts, directly addressed, quoted and annotated, referred and so on – fragmented or implied voices around the fringes of the text. In the live blog, all the interlocutors were, so to speak, *there*, a click of a button away, conducting a textualized conversation in real time. Every interaction between Pax and Riverbend and these interlocutors was within a progressively accruing concretization of the integrity of Pax and Riverbend, and a confirmation of their thinking presence. A prolonged conversation between persons – even a hostile one, it seems to me – involves mutual agreements and progressive clarifications which establish a kind of friendship, a mutual recognition of each other's presence.

The shared backdrop of news reportage was particularly important, because the sense of the everyday in Baghdad that Pax and Riverbend conveyed was built around it. News reportage is a constant and shifting flow, and blogs can be a constant responsive flow to news. The news that was being followed and sieved and analysed in the UK and USA was being similarly followed in Baghdad too, and Pax and Riverbend could put some of that contextually specific reception amidst the contextually specific receptions in the UK and USA. The slippages were the spur of interactions. News reportage is not merely provided and received in contextually nuanced ways, it is moulded or framed in ideologically predetermined ways. To some extent this could be put down to the well-known 'propaganda model' of how news is produced, formulated persuasively by Herman and Chomsky (1988), and in some part to the disposition of the market: what sort of news is consumed most voraciously, what readers want or what sells. Behind what is said, a much larger part remains unsaid or hidden by rhetoric and inflection. Apart from analysing what was said in contextually specific ways, Pax and Riverbend constantly sought to provide the unsaid details, give the links and connections which were missing or misplaced, correct the tacit misconceptions fostered in the news. From arguments about the location of 'weapons of mass destruction' to the 'precision strikes' of the invasion to the Iraqi Governing Council's and Coalition Provisional Authority's

declarations to the reconstruction contracts to the reality of women's experiences in Baghdad before and after invasion, Pax and Riverbend sought to articulate the unmentioned or neglected in the news, and make it matter for debate.

But this goes deeper. News reportage follows a quite distinctive register, one that enacts the differentiation of news from the everyday. The language of news – its rhetorical tricks are familiar to all newsreaders – arguably makes a highlighted and reported event seem newsworthy. The language of news confers significance on what is reported, and takes it out of the indistinguishable flow of the everyday which is not newsworthy, which is captured in everyday and routine exchanges and records. News is conceived thus as the opposite of the everyday, highlighted as opposed to the passing blur, memorable as opposed to forgettable, the significant big thing as opposed to trivial little things. This implied separation of the everyday from the newsworthy doesn't, however, hold water – the relationship of the newsworthy and the everyday is extremely porous: reported policies bear upon individual and domestic lives, reported events float up from the mesh of individual and domestic lives, and so on. Alongside responding to the news as news, Pax and Riverbend maintained a running record of their individual and family lives which *couldn't* be separated from the newsworthy. The ordinariness of family, neighbourly, friendly get-togethers and festivals and daily relationships described with humour and affection by both complicated the newsworthy highlightings of a terror-struck population in the news. What seemed like an Olympian recording of the experience of invasion and occupation – of bombings, raids, abductions, crumbling of basic amenities and infrastructures, unemployment, religious factionalism and violence, repression and dispossessing of women – in the news, was given a visceral and emotional content when viewed through dislocations within everyday life. In both blogs these were feelingly described. The ongoing common backdrop of news provided a boundary and a screen against which or in terms of which the everyday life of Baghdad could be articulated in both blogs and presented to widely dispersed and removed readers/respondents. At various points both bloggers expressed their disgruntlement at the misperceptions and misinformations being generated by the news; their attempts to convey their everyday lives within Baghdad was their retort, as if that could be a corrective. The intensity with which the news was followed in the invasion period served both blogs well.

The fear in the everyday, or of the dislocation of the everyday, because of (and during) the invasion could be effectively conveyed by

both because of the above-noted textual features of the blog form: the integrity and presence of the bloggers constructed through interaction (readers and respondents were concerned about them at various times as friends would be); and the strong impression of everyday life in Baghdad woven against the common backdrop of news. The resonance of that fear can only really be conceived within the conversational blog form. The simplicity of Salam Pax's 2 April 2003 entry beginning with: 'Actually too tired, too scared and burnt out to write anything. Yes, we did go out again to see what was hit. Yes, everything just hurts' (2003, p. 143); or the poignancy of Riverbend's finding out that she had lost her job simply because she's a woman, and walking through her colleagues and noting on 24 August 2003 that, 'Suddenly, the faces didn't look strange – they were the same faces as before, mostly, but there was a hostility I couldn't believe. What was I doing here?' (2005, p. 24) – the effect of these seen retrospectively in the published book is momentary, gives a pause, but within the flow of blog interactions momentous, sinks in. The fear after invasion, which emanated from the crumbling of everyday stabilities, could only be partially accounted in terms of regimes (despite the powerful pressure to do so in the USA and UK and elsewhere). It couldn't merely be disposed off as the transition from a repressive regime to a promised liberal order, or in terms of the contrast between the repression that prevailed there in Iraq and the freedoms and securities that 'we' enjoy 'here'. Fear after invasion conveyed by the blogs was only partially apprehended in terms of stateless anarchy or violence on the Iraqi civil sphere contrasted with the secure comfort 'we' have here. Ultimately, it appears to me, the apprehension of an environment of fear that became possible through these blogs was of a reflexive nature. An environment of fear in the USA and UK was, it has been widely observed, both at large since 11 September 2001 and programmatically exacerbated in the build-up to invasion. The whole 'war on terrorism' business, with the open-endedness of that abstract enemy 'terrorism', was undertaken ostensibly to manage terror within the USA and UK and elsewhere. Quite possibly, the presumption of terror 'within' made sense because it captured something deeper than the particularity of the 11 September 2001 attacks. The presumption made sense because it intermeshed with, and gave a coherent shape to, a plethora of small to large everyday fears which are managed by the panoply of small to large strategies and implements of managing fears. The structure of social stability, it can be persuasively argued, in societies such as the USA and UK is based on a political economy of playing on fears and consuming against fear – the *raison d'être* of sociologist Ulrich Beck's formulation of 'risk society' (1992). It is an

argument that Brian Massumi put (somewhat forbiddingly, but suggestively nevertheless) as follows:

*Fear is not fundamentally an emotion. It is the objectivity of the subjective under late capitalism. It is the mode of being of every image and commodity and of the groundless self-effects their circulation generates. [...] [Fear] is the most economical expression of the accident-form as subject-form of capital: being as being-virtual, virtuality reduced to the possibility of disaster, disaster commodified, commodification as spectral continuity in the place of threat. When we buy, we are buying off fear and falling, filling the gap with presence-effects. (Massumi 1993, p. 12)*

Translated into what I am getting at in this context: the fear of the crumbling of everyday life in Baghdad through the blogs was apprehended by their followers in the USA and UK as a terrifying removal of the possibility of buying security, consuming to protect oneself, which is the everyday life 'here'. It was understood in terms of the security of being able to buy oil, electricity, water, insurance, education, medicine, surveillance systems, arms, gates, houses, legal recourse, and so on – and the impotence of imagining not being able to do so. It particularly made sense as such because of various levels of ongoingness that surround and mesh within the blog form: the process of writing and reading and writing which is the blog form, along with the process of following continuously updated news, along with the process of living from day to day 'there', along with the process of living from day to day 'here'.

I have given the impression above that the blog in published diary form is a less substantial thing, a shadow of the interactive electronic text as it appears. This is obviously motivated by the thrust of this study, designed as it is to get to the nuances of literary production of and within the Iraq invasion period – and to understand the possibilities of the blog form now. From the perspective of literary studies, the published diary derived from a blog is of interest in itself. First, as I have observed in Chapter 1, literary publication is a kind of literary gate-keeping. Since literariness is largely constructed institutionally (by corporations, academia, media), the seal of approval and the attention publication brings cannot be dismissed lightly. Second, and more importantly, the published book form enables discriminate archiving amidst the sheer excess of the electronic archive. Third, and most importantly, the published book form enables a kind of critical reading that processive

engagement with the blog does not. Retrospective and linear organization in the diary form, with a beginning and ending and annotations and editing, allows for discernment of textual patterns and strategies which the dynamic blog form renders unlikely. As critical readings of texts, the former is not necessarily less perceptive than ongoing reading-writing. Such an observation as the following, for instance, about Riverbend's blog could only be possible with the book in hand – and its implications are worth considering:

Riverbend's continuous reversals of mainstream US frameworks of knowledge are certainly strategically viable and compelling as a form of opposition. In fact, they are so compelling that the book collection of her weblog ends with the entry about 9/11/04 in Fallujah, presumably because it is a particularly salient point for U.S. audiences. Moreover, the book is largely marketed as an insider perspective on the real status of Iraqi women, and the fact that they are losing rights and opportunities, as opposed to being liberated. However, because her blog entries are organised and framed as a set of reversals, her counter-narrative engages in a dichotomous logic that ultimately reifies the very categories she wishes to dismantle. [...] In fact, the way in which *Baghdad Burning* is framed for U.S. reception suggests that her story of the Iraq war actually enacts a parallel regime of truth organized around the notion of giving voice to othered, 'Third World' women. (Jarmakani 2007, p. 42)

With the book in view, a complete rather than accruing text, Jarmakani argues for quite a different sense of the veracity of the text and integrity of the author from the one suggested to me by the blog form. To Jarmakani the text appears to be deliberately structured in opposition to an equally complete (retrospective) view of the 'mainstream U.S. framework of knowledge', and is confirmed as such in the marketing and reception history of the published book. And to Jarmakani, Riverbend seems to construct herself as an 'othered "Third World" woman', rather than establishing her integrity through a communication process. Consequently, a somewhat different effect (that is, in the USA) is found for the blog here than the one I have described: not one of disturbing readers' preconceptions in the invasion period, but of reification of the invasive presumptions which it sought to oppose. If the distinctiveness of the blog form is forgotten and the whole published diary text remains as the dominantly archived record, this may well come to be the critical consensus on Riverbend's efforts.

### Conclusion: in other languages

In moving towards a conclusion for this study, I do not attempt to draw together the various half-baked tendencies noted in the preceding chapters. As observed in Chapter 1, I had started with the expectation that the literature of the Iraq invasion may enable clarifications about literature in general now. For reasons enumerated there, I delimited my scope to literature in English which was produced, circulated and received within the Anglophone sphere, primarily within the UK and USA, and focused on the high-pressure invasion period between 2003 and 2005 (though I have occasionally strayed beyond into 2006 and 2007). By looking closely at such works of different genres, I have gestured towards observations which are possibly of moment to contemporary literature in general: the deep moral expectations of, and strategies for collectivizing, protest poetry; the possible reconfigurations of poetry through anger; the parameters within which the everyday and the contemporary are expressed in individual collections of poetry; the emerging features of frontline drama; the current appeal of verbatim or documentary or testimony theatre; the manner in which theatre appeals to concepts of nationality and the classical; the degree to which markets are implicated in the production and reception of 'genre' or 'popular' fiction (action thrillers) and 'literary fiction'; the distinctive literary qualities of blogs; and other more incidental observations in passing. I don't see any need to draw these together into some sort of grand synthesis. The reader can make the connections between the various points in numerous ways – some of which I may not be able to foresee – and openness in trying to conceive of as dynamic and fluid a field as contemporary literature seems desirable to me. Indeed, it would actually be disingenuous of me to attempt a linked-up final statement on contemporary literature because, obviously, such a study as this cannot possibly be regarded as finished.

There is simply a great deal of relevant material which hasn't figured here. Too much is left out to say anything sufficiently generalized for contemporary literature – I am happy to make gestures in that direction, but don't feel I can pronounce. In fact, this cannot even be regarded as a reasonably wide survey of the literature about and of the Iraq invasion. I have occasionally marked omissions within the field of literature in English in the above; considerably more importantly, that this study is limited to literature *in English* is itself reason enough to be modest. The literature about and of the Iraq invasion was substantially produced and circulated and received outside the Anglophone field, in numerous languages and linguistic territories.

In conclusion then, I present a few notes on the inconclusiveness of this study by drawing attention to relevant literature in languages other than English. Some of these have been translated into English, many haven't yet. My inconclusive conclusion is necessarily an exercise in indicating some patterns and exemplifying with a few instances from a simply enormous volume of texts. The patterns that I mark out here resonate with some that are analysed above, and equally show the limitations of the above. To continue in an analytical vein a great number of geopolitical perspectives and cultural traditions need to be taken into account. My inconclusive notes are therefore necessarily not analytical, they are indicative and descriptive.

The most 'othered' of languages other than English for the Iraq invasion context is unquestionably Arabic. An article in the English edition of the Arabic daily *Asharq al-Awsat* in December 2006 observed:

With a few exceptions of Iraqi writers and artists, the continuous bloodshed in Iraq has failed to elicit any poetry or prose from the Arab men of letters. While political writers expounded and analyzed, the literary writers and artists did not channel this harrowing Arab tragedy into creativity, and neither did they attempt to engage with it. Some attribute this absence to the obscurity of the events taking place, while others fear that their expression might be misconstrued as advocating or commemorating the dictator's bygone era [by writing against the occupation]. So many different reasons all converge into one question: Where is the Iraq war literature? (Muhanna 2006)

The article also noted the following:

Iraqi novelist Shaker al Anbari believes that there is a substantial amount of contemporary writing in Iraq, particularly poetry and novels, which are published in the daily newspapers. They deal with topics that range from human suffering in Iraq to emigration and the killing that takes place – but they do not reach an Arab readership. He explained that they were rushed and emotional for the most part because the writer inside Iraq does not have the suitable living conditions to continue his/her creative production. (Muhanna 2006)

The Arabic literary productions of writers inside Iraq are still relatively inaccessible from without as this is written, but some Iraqi writers, mostly émigrés in different parts of the world (like Kishtainy in the UK), have been productive. The poetry of Dunya Mikhail (whose collection



is discussed in Chapter 3) and Saadi Youssef (featured in *The Guardian* and in the Faber anthology *101 Poems Against War*, 2003) has already been mentioned. Quite a few novels by émigrés and exiles described life under Saddam Hussein's regime (to that extent like Kishtainy too, but with very different ideological and aesthetic visions), and the travails of emigration, in ways which were particularly meaningful in the invasion period. Sinan Antoon, who migrated to the USA, wrote the Arabic novel *I'jaam* [*Diacritics*] (2004), translated into English as *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (2007). This is presented as a manuscript found in 1989 in an Iraqi prison, which is prefaced and annotated by the Mukhabarat (military intelligence under Hussein). The fragmentary text is by a Chaldean Christian student of Baghdad University, Furat, and describes the hardships and abuse of life as a student and as a political prisoner during the Iran–Iraq war of the 1980s, with the footnotes giving the official rhetoric where the narrator's account contradicts the establishment view. Najem Wali, who is settled in Germany, offered the Arabic novel which appeared first in German translation as *Die Reisenach Tell al-Lahm* [*Journey to Tell al-Lahm*] (2004). Here two characters, Najem and Ma'ali, are found driving to the Iraqi town of Tell al-Lahm in pursuit of their partners, who have run off together. The stories they tell each other on the way, and their experiences in the eponymous town, paint a bleak picture of Iraq in the 1990s. Alia Mamdouh's *Al-Mahboubat* (2003), translated into English as *The Loved Ones* (2006), is set amongst Iraqi immigrants in Paris, where the author lives. This centres on the life of a 50-year-old woman, Suhaila, and her connections with various protagonists – focusing particularly on female perspectives and experiences, with a significant role for her son Nadir – after she suffers a brain stroke and lapses into coma. Through a variety of registers (conversations, diary, letters) a picture of the Iraqi diaspora and their attachment to Iraq is conveyed. Stories of the past and of migration, with the Iraq invasion behind them, have been written by Iraqi émigré authors in languages other than Arabic too. Noted Iraqi-Israeli author Sami Michael's Hebrew novel *Aida* (2008) describes the relationships of Baghdad-based Jewish journalist Zakhi Dali, a woman named Aida whom he takes in, and his friend Nazar al-Sayad who works for the Mukhabarat. The story revolves around the gradual discovery of Aida's Iraqi-Kurdish identity, and Zakhi's sense of isolation and feeling for the Iraqi landscape amidst a city in ruins after the Gulf War. Iraqi resident in Germany, Abbas Khider's German language novel *Der falsche Inder* [*The False Indian*] (2008), describes various readings of a manuscript found on the Berlin–Munich train. The manuscript tells the story of an Iraqi student

who escapes from prison in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and undertakes a journey through various countries of North Africa and Europe before settling in Germany. Along the way he encounters numerous migrants like himself, and in Germany feels the dislocations of being an immigrant keenly. Turkish author Semra Beken in her novel *Kocamın Bekçisi* [*My Husband's Guardian*] (2008) recounts the experiences of an Iraqi Turkman woman, Naza, with her three children, after her husband dies in the Gulf War. Based on the real experiences of a woman the author met in Vienna and interviewed over six months, the novel details her sufferings as member of a minority in Iraq, and as a stranger in Turkey and eventually an immigrant in Austria.

Arabic literature addressed to Iraq of the invasion and occupation period, and such literature in other languages from the so-called 'Arab world' (in the Middle East and North Africa), form a somewhat distinct category. The French poetry volume, *A Bagdad à Bassora: Amulette* [*Baghdad to Basra: Amulet*] (2003), by the Algerian poet Chekib Abdessalam is worth noting here. Perhaps the most widely circulated novel on the conflict from the region is the Algerian novelist Mohammed Moulessehoul's French novel, written under the pen-name Yasmina Khadra, *Les Sirènes de Bagdad* (2006) – translated into English as *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2007). This describes the experiences of an unnamed student of Baghdad University after he returns to his village Kafr Karum when the invasion begins. Formerly a peace-loving person, a series of experiences – the killing of a simpleton at a check-point, the accidental bombing of a wedding party, and the humiliation of his family during a house raid by American soldiers – brings about a transformation in the main protagonist, an uncontrollable rage and desire for revenge. He consequently returns to Baghdad and joins an anti-occupation resistance organization originating with people of his home village, and sinks into a spiral of terrorism and bloodshed which exacerbates the inhumanities of invasion and occupation. Taking up the female perspective of the invasion zone, the Iraqi author (living in Paris) Inaam Kachachi's Arabic novel *Al Hafida al Amerikiyya* [*The American Granddaughter*] (2008) is about a Christian Iraqi American, Zeina Behnam, who goes to Iraq with the invading American army as an interpreter. She works in the Green Zone, close to the home of her grandmother Rahma, widow of a colonel in the Iraqi army. The difference of perspectives between Zeina and Rahma remain unresolved to the end; Zeina is unable to win the trust or love of her grandmother and relatives and is unable to regain her Iraqi identity because she sees herself as an American. Iraqi novelist Ali Bader's *Haris al Tabigh* [*Tobacco Guard*] (2008) in Arabic, describes the

life of Iraqi Jewish musician Kamal Midhat, who was kidnapped and killed in the city of Al Mansur in Baghdad in 2006. This reflects both on Midhat's past struggle to integrate in Iraqi society and the problems of post-invasion Iraq. Though not from the 'Arab world', German novelist Sherko Fatah (whose father was Kurdish Iraqi) wrote a novel which resonates with some of the themes described above, *Das dunkle Schiff* [*The Dark Ship*] (2008). Here the adventures of a cook, the Kurdish Iraqi Kerim, in invaded Iraq are recounted. Kerim is picked up and obliged to join a group of terrorists, God's Warriors, but escapes them and journeys to Europe, where he gets asylum in Germany.

A number of literary works from elsewhere probed the frontline experiences of those who participated in the invasion alongside USA and UK troops. Spanish author Fernando Marias's novella *Invasor* [*Invader*] (2004) tells the story of a doctor, Pablo, sent to Iraq on a peace mission in August 2003 (the Spanish Prime Minister of the time, José María Aznar, was one of the firm supporters of invasion). There he gets caught in an ambush which he survives, but with serious injuries and at the expense of the lives of those who gave him refuge. Back home in Madrid he begins to feel a change in himself. His guilt about the crimes he committed in Iraq manifests itself in feeling possessed by his Iraqi victims, and he begins to entertain violent impulses towards his family and himself. Denis Gortreau's French novel *A Mort L'Irak* [*Death to Iraq*] (2006) follows the invasion over three weeks, from Kuwait to Northern Iraq to Baghdad, through the eyes of an American soldier and war criminal. Having joined up to escape the dead-end life of his hometown in Oklahoma, the invasion gives him the opportunity to play out his violent desires – justified to his mind as taking revenge for the terrorist attacks in the USA of 11 September 2001. A Puerto Rican play in Spanish, *Irak en mí* [*Iraq in Me*] (2007) was written by Roberto Ramos Perea, and directed by the author in its first performances at the El Ateneo Puertorriqueño y su Conservatorio de Arte Dramático, San Juan, in January–February 2008. This tells of the anguish of two Puerto Rican soldiers, part of the invading US forces, after their return from Iraq. Their participation in the invasion plays in troubling ways against the ambiguous political status of their homeland as an incorporated territory of the USA, and both feel alienated. The Bengali playwright from India, Sangram Guha, wrote *Operation Flush* (2004), first performed in Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata, by Spandan group/Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) under the direction of Samudra Guha in July 2004. This was based on newspaper reports and public records of the trials of US soldiers for torturing prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in the occupation period, and was advertised as one of the first 'documentary

drama' staged in India. The play is set in a courtroom convened by the United Nations in an army camp in Iraq, and follows the hearings of Lt. Colonel Nathan Sassaman, in charge of the Abu Ghraib prison, and cell commander Luke Harding, accused of torture. Cross-examinations of the prisoners and various witnesses by human rights lawyer Nicholas Terse reveal that torture extended to civilians, and was motivated by a sinister experiment to perpetuate terror at a biological level. Though found guilty the accused are handed extremely lenient sentences.

In line with the revival of classical Greek plays resonating with the invasion context (examined in Chapter 4), *Atropa: De wraak van de vrede* [*Atropa: The Vengeance of Peace*] (2008) was adapted by Flemish playwright Tom Lanoye from plays by Euripides and Aeschylus on the Trojan War, and first performed during the Avignon Festival in July 2008, and then at the Tonnelhuis, Antwerp, in August. This focused on the female characters of the Greek myth and Agamemnon, and weaved into the lines of the latter statements by George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld during the build-up to invasion. Anti-invasion satire also played its part in performances in many places. In India the Jana Natya Manch (People's Theatre Association) produced satirical plays in Hindi for different performance spaces. These included the street theatre *Zulm Phir Zulm Hai* [*Oppression is Oppression*] (early 2003), performed in various spots in Delhi, and the proscenium play *Bush ka Matlab Jhadi* [*Bush Means a Thick Shrub* – 'jhadi' is the Hindi translation for 'bush' in the vegetal sense] (2004), commissioned by and performed at the Mumbai World Social Forum, January 2004, directed by Sudhanva Deshpande. Pierre Grou's French play *Le brave soldat Chvéik dans la guerre d'Irak* [*Brave Soldier Schweik in the Iraq War*] (2006) took the son of the intrepid anti-hero of Czech writer Jaroslav Hašek's famous satirical novel *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1923) to the invasion frontline. This Schweik follows the build-up to invasion avidly, goes to Iraq to fight, looks for 'weapons of mass destruction', tries to determine whether the purpose of achieving security and democracy in Iraq was being achieved, and unhappily returns to Prague. Talking of satire, a Norwegian novel by Knut Nærum, *Krig!* [*War!*] (2004) also spoke in a tangential fashion to the concerns of the Iraq invasion period. Here a war between Norway and the Netherlands is envisaged, growing out from a trivial skating accident, and pulling together every kind of absurdity that war rhetoric presents.

And finally, there was popular 'genre fiction' set in the Iraq invasion too. Controversially, two Turkish action thrillers (through the invasion period relations between Turkey and the USA deteriorated) imagined invasions of Turkey by US forces. Burak Turna and Orkun Uçar's *Metal*

*Fırtına* [*The Metal Storm*] (2004) was a bestseller, and describes a US invasion of Turkey to gain control of deposits of borax, followed by an attempt to divide Turkey between Greece and Armenia. Under these circumstances, naturally, the Turkish armed forces fight back valiantly, make alliances with China, Russia and Germany, and even manage to steal a US nuclear warhead and detonate it in Washington DC. An international alliance against the USA finally ends the invasion. Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld figured as such on the invading side. Not long afterwards, Alaettin Parmaksız's *Türk-Amerikan Savaşı – Kanlı Deprem* [*Turkish-American War – The Bloody Earthquake*] (2007) also describes a war between the two nations, arising largely from Turkish disapproval of US interference in the internal affairs of Northern Iraq, and the stout defence against US invasion put up by Turkish armed forces. Less combatively, two detective novels and one work of fantasy fiction appeared in Germany against the backdrop of the invasion. Andreas Albes's *Der Schatz* [*The Treasure*] (2005) has war correspondent Michael Bellow investigating the looting of treasures from the national museum in Baghdad and the operation of aid organisations. In *Code Freebird* (2006) by Roman Rausch, the investigation of a series of bombings in Hamburg and Frankfurt takes profiler Baltazar Levy to invaded Iraq despite the investigating team's scepticism about his methods. And Michael Pfrommer's fantasy, *Das Zweite Buch* [*The Second Book*] (2007), moves back and forth between Babylon of 568 BC, when Ezekiel's prophecies were recorded, and Iraq during the invasion in 2003, when the second book of those prophecies is found there.

These are but a selection of literary texts in languages other than English about the invasion of Iraq which appeared within or around the invasion period. With these in view, the conclusions of this study can only remain inconclusive. There are many more literary works about the invasion out there already than this study has covered, and undoubtedly many more to come. Critical reckonings with this area of literary production and reception are certainly more in the prospect than behind. These will necessarily continue to modify the features of contemporary literature in general.

up and recirculated and hyperlinked and dissected in a variety of ways. Pronouncements by Pinter, poems by Seamus Heaney or Andrew Motion in newspapers, plays by David Hare etc. which seemed directly relevant to the invasion were instantly noted, commented on and analysed, in an extraordinarily diverse and dispersed way on the Internet, for instance. Further, electronic texts which may be regarded as literary (just as diaries and journals may be regarded as literary texts) from unknown persons who were in 'hotspots' or simply made noteworthy arguments surfaced through the chain of blog and discussion forum watchers into the mainstream media and sometimes into mainstream publication. Thus various blogs by persons in Iraq describing their daily lives and thoughts as the invasion proceeded caught the attention of mainstream news media and made it into international book publishing, such as Salam Pax's *The Baghdad Blog* (2003) and Riverbend's *Baghdad Burning* (2005). Some blogs by American soldiers in Iraq were similarly successful: Colby Buzzell's *My War* (2005) and Matthew Currier Burden's *The Blog of War* (2006) come to mind. More significantly for this study, a great deal of literary writing was produced and circulated by known and unknown writers with no known connection to Iraq directly on the Internet, through a variety of electronic forums and networking sites. There was a particular proliferation of anti-invasion poetry. Some of these were engineered into anthologies by anti-invasion litterateurs – those 'chicken soup anthologies full of lousy poetry' that Paterson sputters about. Todd Swift, who had written the bitter letter about Paterson's lecture quoted above, edited an electronic anthology *100 Poets Against the War* (2003) – announced at the time as the fastest anthology ever put together (within a week). Sam Hamill set up a resoundingly successful Poets Against the War website ([www.poetsagainsthewar.org](http://www.poetsagainsthewar.org)) and also put together a published anthology, *Poets Against the War* (2003). In the midst of this effervescence the most revered arbiter of the poetry establishment, Faber and Faber, felt called upon to come up with a topical anthology also, *101 Poems Against War* (2003) – albeit of a very different sort. I return for a closer look at such texts in subsequent chapters. At this juncture here's the point of these observations: in the heat of the lead-up to and invasion of Iraq, the distinctions between mainstream literary publishing and alternative modes of literary production and circulation, established and celebrity pen-wielders and unknown 'ordinary' litterateurs, the great news-hungry public and the select literature-reading constituency, literary authors and activists and political commentators seemed to merge and separate and blur in unexpected ways. Something about the current condition of literary production and circulation and

Simawe, appeared to capitalize on this interest; as did a volume by one of the contributors there, Dunya Mikhail's *The War Works Hard* (2005 [2003]). Insofar as some of these can be regarded as works in English for circulation among an English-reading audience I pick them up below (Mikhail's volume is discussed in Chapter 3). Others of similar interest have appeared in English after 2005, notably Algerian novelist Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2007, from the French *Les Sirènes de Baghdad*, 2006) – those are outside the analytical scope of this study, but are briefly registered in Chapter 6. From a different direction, English language readers had the extraordinary advantage of being able to read blogs kept by Iraqi authors in Iraq through the period of the invasion. Some of these were narrative records and constructions (not fictional constructions but constructions in the sense of evoking personae and locales, and deploying stylistic devices) in the English language (itself a matter that was debated in their pages) which rightly attracted considerable attention at the time and eventually passed into print circulation. I have mentioned such volumes by Salam Pax and Riverbend above – their volumes are discussed in Chapter 6. I have stuck somewhat conservatively with texts available in print for this study, not because that is any assurance of 'quality' (in my experience that is not the case, even if we accept some unambiguous markers of quality) but because print texts still enjoy a stability in archiving which electronic texts do not yet.

In terms of practical delimitations for the following, I have also chosen to focus primarily on literary texts derived from and addressed to the civil and civilian sphere rather than the military. Some of my reasons for this decision are elaborated later in this chapter, when I dwell on the nuances of 'war' apropos the Iraq invasion. In an immediate and simplistic way, the explanation lies in my perception that the civil and the military were largely recorded and narrated and presented in distinct ways for the Iraq invasion particularly and generally by historical convention. Even the count of casualties was maintained separately: Iraq Body Count ([www.iraqbodycount.org](http://www.iraqbodycount.org)) kept a record of civilian deaths in Iraq, while the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count ([www.icasualties.org](http://www.icasualties.org)) maintained records of dead US and UK military personnel. Accounts of the invasion – including literary ones – given by US and UK soldiers in Iraq were often framed in terms of distinctive presuppositions (in terms of nationalistic agendas, heroism and cowardice, the technicalities of warfare) and *given* to readers as expressive of a kind of truth or from the moral high ground of lived professional experience. The presumptions which enable engagement in military action as military personnel, the

troubles the very substance of literature. Numerous poets attest to such interference amidst their immediate environments in Northern America or Britain, the nagging reality of a distant invasion. In most that irritation turns into introspection on poetry and being a poet. Novels and plays often register the invasion as an eruption of the idea that the invasion is really happening in the midst of families and lovers and friends going about their daily lives. It leads to bitter domestic squabbles in McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) and Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (2008, first performed in 2006). It cuts into friendships in Oglesby's *US and Them* (2003) and Baker's *Checkpoint* (2004). In Cicero's *The Human War* (2003), two youngsters pause in mid-coitus as the invasion of Iraq is about to be launched on 20 March 2003:

'People are going to die in a little bit and we're fucking,' I said.

'What else can we do?'

'I don't know, it just feels like there must be something we should be doing.'

'All we can do is fuck.'

'But we're having so much pleasure, and people are going to be suffering so intensely in just a little bit.' (p. 22)

On a related note, perhaps the most telling achievement of Salam Pax's and Riverbend's blogs from Baghdad is that they were able to convey both the everyday reality that was disrupted by the invasion and insert the disrupted everyday reality of the invasion amidst distanced reckonings in the UK and USA. Their own analyses of developments, often responsive to international media coverage, were framed comprehensively by detailed narratives of lives and days in Baghdad – their own and others'. And on a slightly different note, the boundaries between the texts that ostensibly record and report reality (news reports, minutes, press briefings) and literary texts that ostensibly construct plausible fictions were sometimes deliberately blurred. The expectations, in other words, of literary reality and historical reality were not only brought together (that happens often in various kinds of historical fiction, for instance), but were played against each other to shake preconceptions about both in an immediate way. Thus, David Hare's play *Stuff Happens* (2004) and Richard Norton-Taylor's *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry* (2003) incorporated texts that audiences and readers who had followed the news would have been familiar with.