



حوليات آداب عين شمس (مؤتمر قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها)

<http://www.aafu.journals.ekb.eg>

(دورية علمية محكمة)



جامعة عين شمس

“Revisiting or Inventing History? The Cases of Brian Friel’s *Making History*(1988) and Mahmoud Diyab’s *Gate to Conquest*”(1971)

Amal Aly Mazhar

Abstract:

Representation of history in literature has always proved problematic due to the fact that authors find themselves in the dilemma between depicting an impressive “narrative” or a historically authentic account. In an article entitled “Literature writing History” ,prominent Shakespearean scholar John Drakakis queries ”Is the writing of history a recording of the event, an act of referential fidelity whose authenticity supersedes matters of epistemology or even teleology, and for whom language is primarily instrumental, a transparent window onto objective truth?”(28).Moreover ,in his seminal book *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd points to “the crisis of representation”(633) of historical figures and events for “it is human nature to name as truth what is usually the narrative most flattering to ruling vanity”(633).

The two selected plays in this paper Mahmoud Diyab’s *Gate to Conquest*(1971) and Brian Friel’s *Making History*(1988)address the issue of historical representation, as ”the best possible narrative” as Archbishop Lombard ,the biographer of Hugh O’Neil’s life urges, or as “authentic” fact. O’Neil’s controversial status due to his double loyalties to England and Ireland may have led historians to tamper with some details to offer an impeccable history, which Friel attempted to redress by offering an authentic historical representation. Similarly, *Gate to Conquest*(original title *Bab el Futuh*) attempts to offer a “truthful reconstructed reading of the past” not as it actually happened ,but rather as an ideal of what should have happened.

Key words: Representations, objective and subjective history ,”official” versus reconstructed history, Brian Friel, *Making History*, Mamoud Diyab, *Gate to Conquest*.

In his seminal book *The Use and Abuse of History*, Friedrich Nietzsche argues that “Every man and nation needs a certain knowledge of the past ,whether it be through monumental, antiquarian or critical history, according to his objects, powers and necessities”(22).This is understandable as a revisionary act of the past since it has its strong bearing on the present status quo .The concern with History has never ceased to preoccupy thinkers and philosophers for ages .In his important book *History and Truth* ,prominent thinker Paul Ricoeur draws attention to the tension that arises from perceiving History as an objective account of past events or a subjective account or what he calls “historical relativism” that results from the duality between both perspectives .To this effect he states

The meanings of the concepts of history and truth thus merge together. Their duality ,however, does not end here. History is the expired history that the historian recaptures as truth, that is, as objectivity; but it is also the history in process that we are in experiencing and making. How shall we make it into truth?(Ricoeur8)

This paper is concerned with the philosophy of History ,specifically the dichotomy of “objective” and “subjective” representation of history as shown in the two plays under study. Nicholas Grene aptly points out that

The Irish in their obsession with history are often said, like the Bourbons ,to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Modern

Irish dramatists have tried to belie this reputation by a recourse to history which will enlighten and illuminate the present(235)

Revisiting history is specifically of extreme importance for nations which are confronted with crucial turning points , and thus need to revisit their history in order to reach better self-definition of the present. The following statement succinctly sums up the status of Irish literature and its connection with history “It would be difficult to imagine a literature that is so positively obsessed with the national past as the one Ireland has produced in this century” (Lernout67).The obvious causes for such concern on behalf of writers is Ireland’s subjugation to an extended British colonial presence with the concomitant threat of distortion, obliteration and extinction of a collective national memory. Equally ,modern Egyptian history witnessed an upsurge in historical writings in literature to negotiate its national and cultural identity especially after the 1952 revolution which ended a 2500 years’ long of different forms of colonization , closely followed by the 1967 defeat which jeopardized its freedom and identity.(quote Hussein)

However, the major questions raised in this paper concern the interpretation and representation of historical events and figures in semi-historical texts: What is the extent of subjective interpretation, leading to distortion/deletion/change permissible? Do the writer’s personal beliefs and biases channel him/her towards a particular depiction of events and

characters? Can the schism between the subjective “interpretation” of history and “neutral recording” of history be reconciled? Does the need for invoking/creating a hero in crucial times entitle the writer to change well established and proved historical material? Interestingly, some historians idealistically conceive of history as “the pursuit of truth”(Gay), while other historians dubiously question this. This problematic becomes even more complex when historical events and figures are transposed into a literary form, thus allowing for more space for a subjective “interpretation” and personal representation at the expense of the “objective recording of facts”. The problematic of representation of history in literature is on account of the conflict between presenting history as fact or fiction which induced some writers to use their legitimate license to interpret/read history, usually tend to opt for depicting an impressive “narrative,” rather than “a historically authentic account”. In an article entitled “Literature writing History”, prominent Shakespearean scholar, John Drakakis queries

Is the writing of history simply a recording of the event, an act of referential fidelity whose authenticity supersedes matters of epistemology or even teleology, and for whom language is primarily instrumental, a transparent window onto objective truth?(28)

Furthermore, in his seminal book *Inventing Ireland*, Professor Declan Kiberd points out to “the crisis of representation” of historical figures and events, since (2)“it is human nature to name as truth what is usually the narrative most flattering to current ruling vanity”(633). The tension between fact and fiction in the representation of historical figures and events has never subsided.

The two plays selected for this paper are *not* historical plays used for any pedagogical or instructive ends, but are rather plays based on historically authentic figures and events to reflect on present day, crucial conditions. The contention upon which this paper is based is that Brian Friel’s *Making History*(1988) and Mahmoud Diyab’s *Gate to Conquest* (1971) are revisionary acts of history to interrogate and respond to crucial recent events in the respective countries and subsequently address the crucial issues of literary representation of highly important historical events and figures in Ireland and Egypt. The discrepancy between history as “the best possible narrative”, as Archbishop Peter Lombard, the official recorder/biographer of Hugh O’Neill’s life urges, and “authentic fact” forms the central theme and backbone argument in the two plays. Ironically, O’Neill, the national hero in the historic Flight of the Earls, opts for the full recording of his biography, with all its details, including his double loyalties to Ireland and England and objects to selectivity as a strategy to offer an impeccable image of him as a national hero. Interestingly, Friel seems to

support the view of the subjectivity of historical representation, when he explains in the programme note for Field Day's premiere production of the play that "when there was tension between historical 'fact' and the imperative of fiction, I'm glad to say that I kept faith with the narrative". However, Friel's representation shows that he redresses the faulty one-sided depiction of O'Neill. *Gate to Conquest* (original title Bab el Futuh) depicts the failure of historians and scholars to reach objective truth about historical facts both in the remote medieval past and the present (post 1967 traumatic defeat), and thus attempts to offer a reconstructed reading of the past i.e. a subjective interpretation of historical events in an attempt to cope with and interpret not the past, but the crucial moments in the present.

Catherine Belsey explains the nostalgic refuge to history to "fend off an uncertain modernity"

The quest for an authentic reference point in the past, a moment of plenitude from which to fend off an uncertain modernity, and history guaranteed the truth of that moment, its reality and its certainty. History in each of its manifestations was the single, unified, unproblematic, extra-textual, extra-discursive real that guaranteed our readings of the texts which constituted its cultural expression (3-4).

However, Belsey's concept of the historicization process of producing "history", by arguing that the respect for history as a repository of "truth" was the response to, and a symptom of "an anxiety about the present" (3).

It is thus my contention that these two plays as "cultural products", share the common feature of attempting to respond to "the anxiety about the present", to use Belsey's term, in order not only to reassess remote historical facts, but to reflect on present-day events. *Making History* (first published in 1989) was induced by the long, arduous 1970's Troubles decade in Northern Ireland, followed by a highly controversial Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. In such crucial times, the need for the revival of a national hero seems imperative, yet the question remains... how will he be represented? It seemed faulty to invoke an impeccable, one-sided mythical Hugh O'Neill, since he combines heroic, anti-English resistance on one hand, together with his relationship with the English. Similarly, *Gate to Conquest*, written in 1971, was an attempt to revisit history in order to reinterpret the Egyptian-Arab identity in the aftermath of the horrific 1967 defeat. The play depicts a bleak, hazy, no-war, no-peace period, with unprecedented students' uprising and urgent calls for democracy and the reconsideration of many advocated, taken for granted "facts". Hence, there was a need to invoke the remote historical past, represented in the offstage, iconic historical hero Saladin, not as an end in itself, but in order to reflect

on the highly crucial, present-day events by questioning his negative aspects as well as presenting his greatness.

Friel’s concept about writing history:

Interestingly, Friel seems to support the view of the subjectivity of history .He describes his masterpiece *Translations* as “dramatic fiction” .*Translations*, written in the same decade as *Writing History* , tackles the historical fact about the English Ordnance Army commissioned to Anglicize Irish place names and thus demolish Irish identity . Martine Pelletier points out that Friel opted for “dramatic fiction” rather than a truthful account in his other plays which deal with historical figures stating that “The tension between the private realm of the individual story and that most public of realm, History with a capital H, has characterized Friel’s work since the early days”(Pelletier186) .She further explains that in depicting St.Columba’s life, Friel “had taken some liberties with the historical facts known about the saint” and describes *The Enemy Within* which depicts the saint’s life as “neither a history nor biography, but an imaginative account told in dramatic form”(187).This view is in full accordance with what Friel himself believes. In a statement which obviously indicates his preference, Friel highlights and legitimizes the license as well as the responsibility of the writer of imaginative literature :

Writing an historical play may bestow certain advantages, but it also imposes certain responsibilities. The apparent advantages are the established historical facts, or at least the received historical ideas in which the work is rooted and which gives its apparent familiarity and accessibility. The concomitant responsibility is to acknowledge those facts or ideas ,but not to defer to them .*Drama is first a fiction with the authority of fiction. You don’t go to Macbeth for history.*(My italics, Friel “*Translations* and a Paper landscape”)

However, ironically though Friel opts for fictionalizing History to offer his subjective understanding of it ,his play depicts the two sides the factual and the mythological to the extent that urges a critic to state “Friel’s position is not so clear-cut. He senses in himself that need to repossess what he called ‘claiming the disinheritance ‘and to remythologize ;he does not deride it but he remains wary of the consequences “(Pelletier196).

A critic describes the play as “a life[i.e. O’Neill’s]translated into myth(Jones).This is the role of the historian as perceived by Archbishop Peter Lombard, the Primate of Ireland, who writes the “official” version of

O'Neill's biography. Ironically, O'Neill himself refuses Lombard's version of history, since it tampers with facts of history by highlighting only the positive sides and overlooks facts which the historian deems inappropriate, such as O'Neill's connections with the English.

I.i. History as fact:

Ironically, Hugh O'Neill the great national Irish figure who acts as the protagonist opts for an all inclusive "truthful" historical account of his biography, including the negative aspects, which could be detrimental to his reputation as a national hero, since he is in the critical situation of having connections with the English. O'Neill and his English sister in law Mary engage in a discussion exposing the two conflicting points of view. He sums up his dilemma as follows:

O'Neill: Do I keep faith with my oldest friend and ally [Irish rebel]

Maguire and indeed with the Gaelic civilization that he personifies?

Or do I march alongside the forces of Her Majesty? And I've marched with them before, Mary. You didn't know that? Oh, yes. *I've trotted behind the Tudors on several expeditions against the native rebels* (My italics, 27)

By adopting an anti-Irish, pro English discourse by giving the Irish revolutionaries the negative epithet of "rebel", Friel is clearly depicting O'Neill's dilemma, of his awareness of the duplicitous attitude towards his countrymen whom he calls "rebels" and the colonizers with whom he collaborates. Though O'Neill demands from his biographer an objective recording of his life, his anxiety is caused by the hazards of subjectivity of history in posterity and his worry about how historians will record and present his biography

Which choice would history approve [to grasp the Queen's Marshall's hand or [that of] the Fermanagh "rebel"]? Or to use the Archbishop's language if the future historian had a choice of my two alternatives, which would he prefer for his acceptable narrative? (28)

What aggravates matters is that O'Neill's awareness that "the conflict isn't between caricatured national types, but between two deeply opposed civilizations, isn't it? We're really talking about a life and death conflict, aren't we? Only one will survive" (28). His words do not sound like those of the historical O'Neill, but a 20th century figure seeing things from the vantage point of posterity, thus expressing the problematic of representation that Friel was handling.

When his English sister-in-law Mary reminds O'Neill that "Queen Elizabeth [the first] made [him] an Earl" (29), he insists on keeping this piece of information, totally objecting to its deletion. He is reluctant to accept the falsification of facts, for even though he admits that he worked on the

English side against “the native rebels”(27),this fact was deliberately overlooked by Sean O’Falloain, O’Neill’s biographer[and maybe by other historians like Lombard in the play]in order to present an untarnished image of the national hero. Ironically, it is O’Neill who is critical of the historians’ falsification of history by not recording some details, because

That’s the detail our annalists in their wisdom choose to perhaps because they believe, like Peter Lombard, that art has precedence over accuracy. I’m beginning to wonder should we trust historians at all?(27).

I.ii. History as a fictional narrative:

Significantly ,Seamus Deane_is_against_any revisionary act that will dismantle the myth at a time which does not welcome such a revisionist history.To this effect he states

At times it seems that there is a link between the impulse to heroicize[sic!] the past and the consciousness of present political weakness or defeat. Similarly, in those ‘revisionist’ periods, when the myths are dismantled and the concept of ‘objectivity’ rules, there is often an anxiety to preserve the status quo, to lower the political temperature and to offer the notion that historical processes are so complex that any attempt to achieve an overview cannot avoid the distortions and dogmatism of simple-minded orthodoxy(p. xxiii).

The problematic of presenting history as either fact or fiction is decisively resolved by historian Lombard, O’Neill’s biographer, who opts for fictionalizing a national hero to meet the exigencies of the present. He selects and deletes certain facts, just like O’Neill’s modern biographer Sean O’Faolain did in later ages. Standing in contrast to O’Neill, chief historian Lombard he admits that in writing history ”truth is[not] a primary ingredient”(8-9),for “imagination will be as important as information”(9).He explicitly admits that history is fabricated, for “History has to be made...before it’s remade”(9).While O’Neill himself admits “We disgraced ourselves at [the battle of]Kinsale”(65),Lombard insists “you lost a battle...that has to be said. But the telling of it can still be a triumph”(65).This attempt to make and remake history, i.e.to fictionalize history in order to imbue hope in the defeated Irish is seen by Lombard not as a distortion but as an act of salvaging a whole nation from extinction

Lombard: Think of this [book] as an act of *pietas*. Ireland is reduced

as it has never been reduced before---we are talking about a colonized people on the brink of extinction. This isn’t the time for a critical assessment of your ‘ploys

and your 'disgraces' and your 'betrayal'-that's the stuff of another history for another time. *Now is the time for a hero. Now is the time for a heroic literature.* So I'm offering Gaelic Ireland two things. *I'm offering them this narrative that has the element of myth. And I'm offering them Hugh O'Neill as a national hero .A hero and a story of a hero(88).*

Despite the fact that O'Neill himself admits the dilemma between his English connections and Irish loyalty ,Lombard distils O'Neill's life to turn it into a myth. Thus, Lombard's mythological representation of the national hero depends on the deliberate selection of historical facts, rather than giving a detailed "objective account" of facts that could possibly lead to tarnishing the national hero's image.

A man, glorious ,pure, faithful above all who will
Cause mournful weeping in every territory
He will be a God-like prince
And he will be king for the span of his life(93).

Historians can go even to extremes by offering an exaggerated representation of the national hero.The historian's attempt to mythologize the national hero, despite his former connections with the English enemy is even endowed with a sacred halo. When Lombard reads the letter sent by the Pope of Rome in support of the Irish cause "You have long struggled to recover and preserve your liberty and throw off the yoke of slavery imposed on by the English" and offers O'Neill a the chance to "grant plenary pardon and remission of all sins ,as usually granted by those setting out to the war against the Turks for the recovery of the Holy Land"(33),Lombard interprets these words thus" Which means Hugh, that now you aren't fighting a mere war---you are fighting Holy Crusade...which means too, that we are no longer a casual grouping of tribes but a nation state united under the Papal colours"(33).Hence ,Lombard endows O'Neill with a sublime sacred halo which is legitimized by the need to have a national hero.

Similarly, in *Gate to Conquest*, "a fictional historical play in the Crusades in Salaadin's time(Al Qut7)Diyab revisits history and manipulates historical events and figures to express "the anxiety over the present". Written in 1971,the play shows deep political and national involvement[concern] at a crucial historical juncture , a vague "no-war ,no-peace "state of affairs. To this effect a critic states that

After the 1967 defeat,[Egyptian] dramatists were being alerted and started realizing their causes in a more conscious manner ,which

induced them to search in their past for an ideal that can guide them in the future....[such as] Mahmoud Diyab’s *Gate to Conquest* whose play is considered a unique vision[depiction] of the Arab-Israeli conflict Hussein(14)

This state of affairs caused by the horrific 1967 defeat, made Diyab invoke similar situations in distant and recent histories; the catastrophic Arab defeat in Andalusia in the 15th century, 1492 to be precise ,and draws a parallel situation of the tragic occupation and loss of Jerusalem, then its liberation by Salaadin in the 11th century ,then the tragic loss of Palestine in 1948.The interconnectedness of historical cycles makes he dramatist structure the play on three levels. To this effect a critic points out

There are different interrelated levels in the dramatic world of the play

1-Present -day Reality: Post military, social and political Egypt, to put in a nutshell, the death of the nationalist project.

2-History: historical events related to Salaadin’s military victory in the 12th century.

3-The Dream and a critical vision which aspires to change, represented in Usama and his book *Gate to Conquest*.

The dramatic structure of the play depends on the dialectical relation between these levels, as they interrelate, separate and interact with each other on the different temporal levels of the play. (Alsayed)

The interconnectedness of past and present as perceived by the dramatist clearly spells out his belief that past historical mistakes if not fully understood will eventually be repeated, thus putting into effect Spinoza’s belief “those who do not understand the past will tend to repeat the same mistakes in the present. Moreover ,this dramatic structure which shifts between different temporal levels “is used as an alienating device to break the dramatic illusion”(Ahmed299)that incites the audience’s intellectual involvement.The dramatist’s creation of imaginary historical events in the remote past,mingled with the present creates a distancing effect which urges the audience to interact intellectually .

The 1967 defeat traumatized different generations and led to the unprecedented, overwhelming angry Egyptian students’ demonstrations for the first time in a post-independence period. The sense of loss and trauma and the need to re-evaluate matters are reflected in the group of angry youths who find their salvation in revisiting, even reconstructing an ideal history, in an attempt to counter and rebut misleading “official history”. They are assisted in their attempt to understand and evaluate matters by the

fictitious Usama bin Ya'coub ,whose sincere visionary character as a historian stands in stark contrast with the “official” recorder of history, Emad el Din who always applauds and justifies his master’s mistakes,and hence their perpetuation.

The play which is built on three temporal levels aims at linking the fall of Andalusia in the 15th century and the fall of Palestine in 1948. The defeat in the present is a clear indication that history repeats itself if a sincere, serious revisiting of history does not take place.

II. Official ,recorded History Versus reconstructed History:

The engagement with different types of historical representation—official versus fictional history is a core issue in the play, where “official” history is depicted as false, fabricated and misleading ,whereas ironically, the fictionalized, reconstructed history is truthful as it expresses the traumatized youths’ dreams. The play opens in a metatheatrical fashion, when a group of politically traumatized and frustrated youths gather to question and discuss the political deadlock in order to seek an outlet for this predicament. Thus they propose to “take up history as a pastime to break the deadlock of silence”(16)imposed by the traumatic ,unprecedented defeat.

We’re the anxious, disturbed generation. Born with no wings to fly. We came too late. There’s nothing to chew except bitterness. Our legacy is a sin and a yoke. Our heads are buried deep in the earth(16).

II .i. The Falsity of Official, Recorded History:

In a clear reference to the false reports and information transmitted and disseminated before and during the 1967 defeat, the play clearly rejects official, recorded history as falsification of facts, leading to catastrophic results. This is depicted in the bombastic work of Emad El Din, the authorized historian of the historical national hero, Salah el Din. Dramatizing their frustration and psychological trauma, the group of youths rejects recorded history as “cowardly and hypocritical” ,and seek to reshape history by re-imagining and reconstructing it.For Diyab, “authentic history” is expressive of the dreams and aspirations of a whole nation ,regardless whether it actually happened or not.

Official historian, Emad el Din “coiner of words” ,as he proudly describes himself(51),or as the visionary Usama disdainfully refers to him and his likes as skilful in ”verses of false flattering poets”(50),and “all those mercenaries and speakers of empty words”(58),Emad el Din records “official history”,i.e only records victories in pompous words, but totally ignores defeats and personal drawbacks. This official recorder of history has one main mission which is to praise victorious men in power and not the common man, and thus is an obstacle to any dream of change. The official recorder stigmatizes his opponent, the idealistic visionary Usama by calling him “infidel”(51),and threatens him “you’ll perish if you remain here one moment longer. Come, take your book and get out, there’s no place for you

among us here”(51).The conflict between false and authentic recording of history is represented by the two characters, Emad el Din and Usama bin Ya’coub, respectively, or as Ricoeur defines it “good and bad history”

Worthy of note is that the legendary historical figure Salah el Din who is kept as an offstage character is represented in mythical terms by the recorder of official authority ,Emad el Din to endow him with a superhuman halo of courage, ,wisdom and clairvoyance .This is insightfully commented on by a critic who draws attention to the fact that Salaadin is invoked to draw a parallelism between Saladin in the past and the present state of affairs which they are living and the present counterpart “the leader who failed their expectations” ,due to the resemblances between conditions and personalities (characters).This blending between history and actuality is intentional in order to “draw a parallelism between the two counterparts-the actual and the historic so that history and actuality are reflective of each other(are mutually reflective)and blend in one whole which invites meditation and reconsideration of matters”(S’aadany6).Thus the invocation of the historic figure Saladin is not an end in itself ,but is used to project on the then present leader who “failed the people’s expectations” ,traumatized a whole nation and jeopardized its newly attained, long-awaited for freedom.

Emad el din,as the amoral pole representing the falsification of history , does not only disdain and taunt the visionary Usama bin Ya’coub(the opposite moral pole that supports authentic history) by his reluctance to listen to him, but actually encourages the perpetuation of an undemocratic ruler who is in no need for advice. The depiction of the official historian is an indictment of glorification of the faultless, impeccable ruler

Emad: The *lion* [Saladin] rushing over the hill isn’t in the least interested in dreams. *He sees his way with his own eyes, and goes into action, realizing what had seemed a fantasy to others ,as you can see.* Therefore, take your [history] book and go home ,lad(*My italics,42*).

II. ii. Fictionalized, ”authentic” history:

Standing in clear contrast with official, distorted history ,is the fictionalized, reconstructed version of history which, ironically, proves to be “authentic”, because it honestly expresses their aspirations. The group of politically traumatized youths gather(13-14)to discuss an outlet to their crisis by seeking an alternative ”fictionalized” version of history, one which did not actually take place ,but is truly expressive of their dreams. “Reconstruction of history” is considered a sort of a “game”(19), as one of the youths calls it in order to reassess their present day dilemma ,and does

not seek any escapist romances “you must understand that we haven’t resorted to history to work up some romance”(19).

Reconstructing or fictionalizing history by these frustrated ,yet zealous youths aims at bringing about a transformation to the traumatizing standstill in the aftermath of the defeat, and to challenge the distortion of history that is brought about “official records” ,and offer an alternative version of history which they deem more truthful than official records. While some youths believe that “history

Is truth”(16),and “fertile”, because “history can’t twist facts”(17),others meaningfully state that

We may believe that history rarely lies, but *history is a coward, a hypocrite and a slave to the masters ,often forgetting facts. No, deliberately, so that tyrants stay put, also opportunists and mercenaries. Victorious generals, especially bastards and eunuchs, THEY become the heroes.(my italics,17)*

The desire to redress the aftereffects of the traumatic 1967defeat can only take place if history is not subjected to change ,falsification or distortion. In order to do so, the youths decide to reconstruct an alternative ,imaginary version of history which they aspire to

Youth5 :*We won’t read history as it was recorded. We’ll remake it.*

Girl 2:How,if we can never retrieve it?

Youth5 :*I mean we’ll imagine it in the way we like ,put back what was left out and throw away what we don’t accept. In a word. We create truth (My italics17).*

For them, “making history” does not imply in the least an act of the distortion of history ,for on the contrary ,it implies a much needed, corrective act . For this end, they “invent the character of the visionary revolutionary ,Usama bin Ya’coub and recreate the events of the liberation of Jerusalem by Salah el Din in1187[after the battle of Hittin](11).In replacing the rejected official history by the alternative version of history, they see that their “mission is rewriting history and to find revolutionaries whose names are not recorded in books or on tombstones”(23).The invented visionary revolutionary is an exemplar for the youths ,is an exemplar because he encapsulates all yearned-for values. Standing in opposition to the falsehoods propagated by official authorities, Usama “never tells a lie” ,and “has the heart and sensibility of a poet”(24).This ultimately endangers Usama “

because he called for change ,his ideas disturbed the authorities, made them anxious, kindled their wrath and Usama was often chased by the police(26)

Ironically, this “invented” revolutionary who could very well signify a yearned-for saviour, does not offer an “objective” recording of History, for

he offers instead an idealistic set of rules and code of good governance in his Book, which is ridiculed by his opponent, the distorter of history and sarcastically calls it “A New Quran” ,to which Usama responds” It’s not a Quran ,let’s call it a dream”(41).Calling his Book “The Road to Conquest” ,he explains ”it’s the road the nation has to pass through to regain its strength, dignity and respect”(43).Usama further warns that drastic changes have to take place for

Usama: The ship is about to sink. To salvage it,we’ve got to throw

out some weight...Set the slaves of the nation free. There is no freedom for the land without a free people[for]a slave has no motive to die for the freedom of his masters(45).

He earnestly warns them against a devastating change ”The Deluge is coming”(48) “I don’t even have a name for it, but I feel it like an erupting volcano .It will wash all diseases from the inner roots”(49).A new phase of change will ultimately set in “and from these ruins a new immaculate nation rises”(50).The peak of the visionary’s dream is encapsulated in his dictum “democratic consultation should be the rule”(47),for the state of affairs has to be drastically changed and the people have to realize that ”the ruler is the servant of the nation”(45).

The visionary’s call for gradual change arouses a controversy ,for some youths accept it while others express their discontent

I think Usama made a mistake right from the start, arguing with the masters over his ideas. A revolutionary doesn’t persuade

his enemies :he simply imposes his will on them, and crushes them

underfoot if necessary(61)

I contend that revisiting history in this play is not done to assess such a legendary historical who lived in the historically remote 12th century, but more important still because it has its bearing on the present then. Diyab’s tone of frustration and discontent is clearly detected here and could be tantamount to resistance and a rebellion against the status quo then (1971)

Conclusion:

The revisionary act of History , sometimes even inventing it in literature , is not done as an end in itself, but is manipulated to respond to “the anxiety over the present”, as Belsey suggests .History is legitimately invoked, not in an “objective” light ,but as the writer’s subjective response and understanding of this history. Friel’s words in *Translations* aptly define such a case “It is not the literal past ,the facts of history that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language”(page?). It is my belief that Friel was expressing his “anxiety over the present” in a post Troubles decade period ,by invoking and revisiting history in *Making History*. Did the need for a national hero in such hard times urge Friel to revisit the past and revive an unblemished image of the national her? Could Hugh O’Neill, with his double loyalties ,metaphorically reflect the turbulent schism in a divided Ireland in recent times ,in a post Anglo-Irish treaty which was concluded in 1985? Could Lombard’s “unfaithful” recording of history be legitimate , justifiable and forgivable by his wish to present a unitary, uncontroversial image of this national hero, without any blemishes ,even if these blemishes have proved to be historically true to suggest a united Ireland? Was Salah el Din not the legendary historical figure, but symbolically represented Nasser “a man of war, not thought” as one of the angry youths in the play succinctly puts it and dare not openly

In the final analysis ,the obsession with history should not be criticised as an escapist act from a dismal present. Professor Kiberd explains “The Irish[who] are accused of never forgetting, but that is because the English never remember. The Irish are accused of endlessly repeating their past, but they are forced to do so precisely because the English have failed to learn from theirs”(Kiberd,1985:93).However ,for the Egyptians, the tendency to repeat the past is on account of forgetting, rather than always remembering it as the Nobel prize winner novelist Naguib Mahfouz succinctly coins it as an aphorism “The defect in our alley[country] is the tendency to [forget] oblivion”.Thus, revisiting the past is a salubrious act, for whenever history is revisited or invented, it is certainly manipulated to respond to “the anxieties of the present”. In a chapter entitled “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History”, Ricoeur shows that his concern is not objectivity or subjectivity as ends in themselves ,but between good and bad representation of History for the benefit of “the Human subject himself”

The historian’s profession has seemed to us to be sufficient to distinguish between the good and the bad subjectivity of the historian. Perhaps the responsibility of philosophical reflection would be to distinguish between the good and the bad objectivity of history. For reflection constantly assures us that the object of history is the

Human subject himself(Ricoeur39)

Thus the rationale of the creative writers’ license to take a revisionary, subjective standpoint towards history by fictionalizing it could possibly serve good ends. The need to create a hero or a saviour in dire historical times becomes commendable, in order to conduct a revisionary reading of History to imbue optimism in a traumatized nation that seeks redirection, self definition or salvation. Whether in a post-Troubles’ period in Ireland or in a post 1967 defeat in Egypt , the subjective reading and reconstruction of History should not be taken as acts of distortion, but could possibly be commendable acts for “the benefit of the Human subject himself”.

الملخص:

إعادة قراءة التاريخ أم تزييفه؟ نماذج من مسرحية برايان فرييل "تزييف التاريخ" (1988) ومسرحية محمود دياب "باب الفتوح" (1971) **آمال علي مظهر**

يمثل تناول التاريخ وتصويره في الأدب إشكاليه كبير في نظرنا لأن الكتاب الذين يقومون بذلك يجدون أنفسهم في حيرة ما بين تصوير التاريخ علي إنه "رواية" مؤثره أو تسجيل أمين وحقيقي لما حدث بالفعل. في مقاله بعنوان "الأدب يكتب التاريخ" يطرح العلامة المتخصص في دراسات شكسبير جون دراكاكيس التساؤل الآتي "هل تعتبر كتابة التاريخ تسجيل للأحداث يتسم بالإخلاص الذي تتجاوز مصداقيته أمور الإستمولوجيا المعرفية حيث تقوم اللغة أساسا بدور فعال، أي إنه بمثابة نافذه شفافة علي الحقيقه "الموضوعية". ومن جانب آخر فإن الناقد الأيرلندي الشهير دكلان كايبيرد في كتابه "إختراع أيرلندا" يشير إلي "أزمة تصوير" الشخصيات والأحداث التاريخيه وذلك لأن "الطبيعه البشريه تنجح لإن تطلق كلمة الحقيقه علي الروايه التي تمتدح الذين يتولون السلطه".

تتناول المسرحيتين "باب الفتوح" لمحمود دياب و"تزييف التاريخ" لبرايان فرييل إشكالية التصوير التاريخي، إما بوصفه "أفضل الروايات" كما يعتقد لومبارد، كاتب السيره الذاتيه للبطل القومي الأيرلندي هيو أونيل، أو كواقع "حقيقي" حدث بالفعل. قد يكون موقف أونيل المثير للجدل من حيث ولاؤه المزدوج لإنجلترا وأيرلندا "هو مادعا بعض المؤرخين لتغيير بعض التفاصيل لكي يقدموا صورته نموذجيه لأونيل وتاريخ لايشوبه اي شائبه، وهو أمر حاول فرييل أن يصححه وذلك بأن يقدم صورته حقيقيه. وبشكل مشابه، حاول دياب في مسرحية "باب الفتوح" أن يقدم قراءه حقيقيه للماضي، ليس كما حدث بالفعل، ولكنه يقدم صورته مثاليه لما كان يجب أن يحدث.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Samy Soliman(1995)Experimentation in Mahmoud Diyab's plays:*Gate to Conquest*" *Fusul* periodical, Vol14, No1
- Al Qut, Abdel Qader(1984)"Mahmoud Diyab the dramatist" *Ibdaa'* periodical:February1984
- Al Sa'daany, Ahmad(1985)Mahmoud Diyab's Dilemma between Thought and Authority(*Hiret Mahmoud Diyab bayna al fikr walsaif*).Dar Hiraa, Cairo
- Belsey, Catherine (1992)."Literature, History, Politics" *Modern Criticism and Theory*: Longman, New York
- Deane, Seamus(1991)*The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* :Field Day Publications, Faber: Derry
- Diyab, Mahmoud(1999)*Gate to Conquest* trans. Fatma Moussa Mahmoud &Amal Aly Mazhar. Prism Literary Series8,Ministry of Culture ,Egypt . Foreign Cultural Relations.
- Drakakis, John(1995)."Literature Writing History" *History in Literature* The Third International Symposium on Comparative Literature, Cairo University.
- Friel ,Brian (1989).*Making History* ,Faber and Faber ,London.
- Friel, Brian , Kevin Barry and John Andrews(1983)"Translations and Paper Landscape Between Fiction and History" *The Crane Bag* Vol7 No2
- Gay, Peter (1974)*Style in History* New York
- Greene,Nicholas(1999)*The Politics of Irish dram a:Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel*: Cambridge University Press, UK
- Hussein, Muhamad Abdullah(1998)Mahmoud Diyab's Drama: The Cause and Dramatic Structure(*Masrah Mahmoud Diyab :Al qadiyah walbinna' alfanni*):Dar Al Thaqafaa algadeeda, Cairo
- Jones, Nesta(2000)*Brian Friel* :faber& faber, London

“Revisiting or Inventing History? The Cases of
Brian Friel’s Making History(1988).....

Amal Aly Mazhar

Kiberd, Declan(1995)*Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*: Vintage, UK
Kiberd ,Declan (1985)“Anglo-Irish attitudes in Ireland’s Field Day Theatre Company
Hutchinson, London.

Lernout ,Geert(1988) “Branville and Being: The Newton Letter and History ” in *History
and Violence in Anglo Irish Literature*, eds. Joris Duytschaver and Geert Lernout, Rodopi,
Amsterdam.

Nietzsche, Frierdrich. (1957)*The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins: New
York

Pelletier, Martine(1994).”Telling Stories and Making History :Brian Friel and Field Day”
Irish University Review,Vol.24,No2(Autumn-Winter,1994)pp.186-197

Ricoeur, Paul(1965)*History and Truth*. Translated , with an introduction ,by Charles A.
Kelbey. Evanston, Illionois : Northwestern Univ.Press,1965