



ÜTOPYA VE EREWOHN FARKLI ZAMANLARDA İKİ HAYALİ ÜLKE

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Erol BARUT*

ÖZET

Sir Thomas More'un *Utopia* ve Samuel Butler'ın *Erewhon*' u aynı türden iki yapıttır. Bu kitapların her birinde hayali bir ülkeden söz edilir. Bu ülkeler ideal toplumlar içerir. Plato'nun *Republic* eserinden beri ideal bir devlet bir çok sayıda kitabın konusu olmuştur.

Utopia 'nın yayımı ile *Erewhon'un*ki arasında üç yüz yılı aşkın bir zaman aralığı olmasına karşın başlıklarının da çağrıştırdığı gibi yakın bir ilişki vardır: Her iki eserde de her şeyin yolunda gittiği sonuç olarak herkesin mutlu olduğu bir hayali ülke anlatılırken Sir Thomas More filozof ve Samuel Butler hicivci olarak ön plana çıkar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz Edebiyatı, Hayali Ülkeler, Sir Thomas More, Samuel Butler

UTOPIA AND EREWOHN TWO IMAGINARY LANDS AT DIFFERENT TIMES

SUMMARY

Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* are two works of the same kind. In each of these books an imaginary country is described. These countries include ideal societies. Since Plato's *Republic* an ideal sate has been the subject of a number of books.

Despite the fact that there is a span of over three centuries between the publication of *Utopia* and that of *Erewhon*, as their titles suggest, there is a close connection between them: While an imaginary society where everything goes all right, consequently everybody is happy is described in both of these works Sir Thomas More is a philosopher and Samuel Butler a satirist.

Key Words: English Literature, Imaginary Countries, Sir Thomas More, Samuel Butler

Asst. Prof. Dr., Foreign Languages Division, English Department, Education Faculty, Uludağ University, 16059, Bursa.

INTRODUCTION

Descriptions of an ideal social state, providing happiness for all, began at least as early as Plato's *Republic*. The concept has inspired some works. Two of them are Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. Despite the differences between them they have many points in common.

Sir Thomas More uses *Utopia* as the title. It makes use of Greek. The title *Utopia* means "Nowhere". On the other hand, Samuel Butler spells "Nowhere" backwards suggesting a satirical wit. It seems to me Butler's title, *Erewhon*, offers at the same time a limited but in a way an original explanation of satire, i.e. saying something to mean just the opposite.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Firstly, let us look at the existing conditions when *Utopia* and *Erewhon* were written. It is certainly very important to recall the background.

UTOPIA

During the reign of Henry VIII *Utopia* was written. More's England was a difficult place to live in. There were many soldiers unemployed. The enclosure laws caused many to lose their work and unemployment increased to a very serious extent. As a result, people were either forced to steal or do worse. The laws against the thieves, capital punishment in particular, led many to be murderers. So violence grew. The social welfare of the country was indeed very bad: hospitals etc. were not enough to meet the demand. Indeed the state seemed at a loss without realising the effect of this corruption. The historian, John Brewer, comments that there were:

'no poorhouses, no hospitals, though the sweating sickness raged through the land, but the poor left to perish as paupers by the side of the ditches. Filling the air with fever and pestilence; houses never swept or ventilated, choked by rotten thatch above and unchanged rushes within, streets reeking with offal and filthy puddles, no adequate supply of water for cleanliness or health, penal laws stringently enforced, more stringently as the crime grew greater... justice proud of its executions, and wondering that theft multiplied faster than the gibbet.' (cited in Downs 1992:14)

E.BARUT/ÜTOPIYA VE EREWOHN FARKLI ZAMANLARDA İKİ HAYALİ..

This was the backdrop against which More composed *Utopia*. Monarchs of the era were absolute dictators. Deceit and trickery were the approved devices of diplomacy; favouritism and injustice prevailed on every side.

Thomas More's *Utopia* was written with an intention and hope to correct or reform. Sir Thomas More has certainly borrowed or has been influenced by Plato's *Republic*.

On the other hand, *Utopia* was written when a new learning was widening the outlook of Mankind in Western Europe in More's time. Discoveries were making the world a larger place to live in.

EREWHON

Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, on the other hand, was written when the Industrial Machines and Scientific Progress seemed to flourish at the expense of moral values.

The effect of these developments on Victorian character has been described by the historian David Thomson. There was a social unrest in England. David Thomson says:

The whole meaning of Victorian England is lost if it is thought of as a country of stuffy complacency and black top-hatted moral priggery. Its frowsty crinolines and dingy hansom cabs, its gas-lit houses and over-ornate draperies, concealed a people engaged in a tremendously exciting adventure-the daring experiment of fitting industrial man into a democratic society. Their failures, faults, and ludicrous shortcomings are all too apparent: but the days when Mr. Lytton Strachey could afford to laugh at the foibles of the 'Eminent Victorians' have passed, and we must ask ourselves the question of whether we can laugh at our great-grandfathers' attempts to solve problems to which we have so far failed to find answer. At least the Victorians found greatness, stability, and peace and the whole world, marvelling, envied them for it. (1979:928)

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Despite the setting of the plots, both *Utopia* and *Erewhon* turn on England and secondly the Europe of their time. Points emphasized in *Utopia* as well as *Erewhon* are generally very similar.

Utopians stress the significance of good marriage and healthy children for a sound community. Erewhonians consider illness as a crime and declare that a nation can flourish only with healthy citizens.

Moral qualities are likewise important in both. But Butler laughs at Erewhonians who seem ready to sacrifice good health for a pretence of moral excellence. There is no such stress in *Utopia* on health; moral values seem to weigh more.

In *Erewhon* Samuel Butler points out that crime can only be remedied by improving social conditions. There seems however an air of condemnation in Butler' s tone. On the other hand, the concept of crime is very strongly satirized in *Utopia*. When condemning the English legislation for the execution of thieves, I think, Sir Thomas More is at his best as a satirist in *Utopia*. More is actually saying that capital punishment cannot solve the problem of thieves. That is a social problem and by executing thieves caught, the law is forcing these thieves to become murderers. Suggestions for open-air prisons, at last put into practice, are to be found in this together with many other useful suggestions.

That "the money is the root of all evil' is again present in both of the Utopias. In fact More doesn't allow money for the Utopians. Gold chains are used for slaves. Butler's view on money is also parallel to that of More. Butler thinks that what matters in *Erewhon* considerably is the gap between the poor and the rich rather than any other differences. He is quite satirical - and bitter too, I think - when he says that the rich get richer and the poor poorer. It is interesting to note here that Karl Marx's idea of the English as well as European Society seemed to be closely identical and that this gap became the slogan in many parts of the world so many years later. There was a great realism in Butler's observation: nationalism or racialism does not seem as significant and dangerous as the economic gap existing between the rich and poor countries, i.e. in today's terms, the developed and underdeveloped countries.

In *Utopia*, the concept of death is treated in a more conventional manner and we read of the moral and religious formalities but Butler does not consider death as "being out of life". His narrative of the World of the Unborn and "the

E.BARUT/ÜTOPYA VE EREWHON FARKLI ZAMANLARDA İKİ HAYALİ..

sprit living in others after death is brought to its highest pitch when he makes fun of the people who take all the conventional trouble when someone is dead. Butler's Erewhonians instead send "artificial tears according to the degree of intimacy".

Utopia and *Erewhon* are also very similar in construction - in that they both seem incoherent but are interwoven in an artistic manner. *Utopia* seems rather rigid in rules whereas *Erewhon* is paradoxical in the treatment of the realities of inconsistent life rather than those of an ideal society. More also seems a little contradictory because he can't prove all his Utopians equal as he states. The oldest man in the family etc. seems to rule. Certainly More's concept of equality concerning hierarchy and order is different than that of Butler.

As for the treatment of religion in these books, one can easily make this distinction: Samuel Butler comes out with a satire on religion, especially the conventional religion in the Musical Banks. Sir Thomas More's virtue, however, seems to be his tolerance in religion. He doesn't even allow the Christian missionary to try to convert Utopians. *Utopia* is certainly more rational of the two then.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this essay, I feel safe to say that if *Utopia* is the work of a philosopher and a moralist, Butler's *Erewhon* is that of a satirist as well. *Erewhon* is a form of anti-Utopia in which illness is a criminal offence children choose their parents and health and beauty signify morality. Butler sees his world as it is - not an ideal state but full of inconsistencies and makes fun of it - laughs at his world as well as himself. In this, he is much closer to Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. In tone, Butler is an Erewhonian whom one may compare and contrast with the Utopian very well indeed. Certainly Butler must have made an equal use of *Utopia* as More had done with Plato's *Republic*. However, Butler seems to be more of a satirist and less of a philosopher whereas More is more of a philosopher and less of a satirist. But this does not make any of the two better or worse. Both are extremely good in their works and in their times as

BALIKESİR ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

well as in our times. Samuel Butler, as a satirist, displays a strange humour all through his work which makes it more appealing to modern reader. Here is a passage from *Erewhon* to illustrate what I mean :

Young man," said the judge, "do not talk nonsense. People have no right to be young, inexperienced, greatly in awe of their guardians, and without independent professional advice. If by such ingredients they cutrage the moral sense of their friends, they must expect to suffer accordingly." (Butler 1996:76)

REFERENCES

- Butler, S. (1996) **Erewhon**. Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited,.
- Cazanmian,L. (1957) **The Revolt Against Mechanism**, London J.M.Denmt and Sons LTD,
- Downs,B,R. (1992) **Vision of Never-Never Land**. New York. Barnes and Noble, INC.
- Thomson,D. (1979) **The Norton Antology of English Literature**, Vol: 2, W. W. Toronto, Norton and Company, Inc.,
- Törel, S. (1980) **More's Utopia-The Evil of States**. Ankara. Hacettepe and Taş Books LTD,