

Imperial Echoes: A Postcolonial Critique of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" ¹

Yakut AKBAY ²

Submitted by: 10.07.2024

Accepted by: 05.12.2024

Article Type: Research Article

Abstract

This article provides a postcolonial critique of Rupert Brooke's First World War poem "The Soldier" (1914), revealing the underlying imperialist ideologies embedded in the poem. Written at the beginning of the First World War, the poem epitomises patriotic enthusiasm and glorifies the idea of dying for one's country. However, from a postcolonial perspective, the poem can be interpreted as a reflection of the colonial mindset that prevailed during Brooke's time. The assertion that a piece of foreign land could forever be England illustrates the colonial pretensions and cultural superiority inherent in British imperialism. Brooke's idealisation of England and the depiction of the soldier's death as a sacrifice under the English heaven serve to morally justify colonial expansion and warfare. This perspective ignores the presence and experiences of the colonised peoples, reducing them to mere backdrops for British heroism. Furthermore, the poet's emphasis on England's inherent virtues such as flowers, air and rivers points to a narrative of cultural hegemony. By focusing exclusively on the British soldier's allegiance to England and glorifying the sense of Englishness, the poem neglects the brutal realities and ethical aspects of colonialism. This study therefore argues that Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" employs patriotic idealism to glorify Englishness and sacrifice, which, from a postcolonial perspective, legitimizes the imperialist ideologies and cultural hegemony of British colonialism.

Keywords: Colonialism, Englishness, First World War, Imperialism, Jingoism, Rupert Brooke

Citation: Akbay, Y. (2024). Imperial echoes: A postcolonial critique of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier". *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 24(4), 1939-1952.

¹ This study does not require ethics committee permission.

² Ankara Bilim University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English Translation and Interpretation, yakutakbay@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1557-232X

Emperyalist Yankılar: Rupert Brooke'un "Asker" Adlı Eserinin Postkolonyal Bir Eleştirisi

Yakut AKBAY³

Başvuru Tarihi: 10.07.2024

Kabul Tarihi: 05.12.2024

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Rupert Brooke'un Birinci Dünya Savaşı şiiri "The Soldier" ("Asker") (1914) üzerine postkolonyal bir eleştiri sunarak, şiirin alt metinlerinde yer alan emperyalist ideolojileri ifşa etmektedir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başında yazılmış olan şiir, vatansever coşkuyu simgelemekte ve ülke için ölmeyi yüceltmektedir. Ancak, postkolonyal bir bakış açısıyla, şiir Brooke'un döneminde hüküm süren sömürgeci zihniyetin bir yansıması olarak yorumlanabilir. Yabancı bir toprağın sonsuza dek İngiltere olabileceği iddiası, İngiliz emperyalizminin içsel sömürgeci iddialarını ve kültürel üstünlüğünü gözler önüne sermektedir. Brooke'un İngiltere'yi idealize etmesi ve askerinin ölümünü İngiliz cenneti altında bir fedakârlık olarak tasvir etmesi, sömürgeci genişlemeyi ve savaşı ahlaki olarak haklı çıkarmaya hizmet etmektedir. Bu bakış açısı, sömürgeleştirilen halkların varlığını ve deneyimlerini göz ardı ederek onları Britanya kahramanlığının arka planı olarak küçültmektedir. Ayrıca, şiirin İngiltere'nin çiçekleri, havası ve nehirleri gibi içsel erdemlerine yaptığı vurgu, kültürel hegemonya anlatısını pekiştirmektedir. Şiir, yalnızca İngiliz askerinin İngiltere'ye olan bağlılığına odaklanarak ve İngilizlik duygusunu yücelterek, sömürgeciliğin acımasız gerçeklerini ve etik yönlerini ihmal etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Rupert Brooke'un "Asker" adlı eserinde İngilizliği ve fedakârlığı yüceltmek için vatansever idealizmi kullandığını ve bunun postkolonyal bir perspektifle değerlendirildiğinde, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin emperyalist ideolojilerini ve kültürel hegemonyasını meşrulaştırdığını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgecilik, İngilizlik, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Emperyalizm, Jingoizm, Rupert Brooke

³ Ankara Bilim Üniversitesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi, İngilizce Mütercim ve Tercümanlık Bölümü, yakutakbay@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1557-232X

Introduction

Unprecedented levels of destruction, suffering, and death characterised the horrors of the First World War. The war introduced new forms of warfare that led to mass casualties and immense psychological trauma. It left the entire Europe with the sense that “the bases of civilisation had been destroyed” and “that all traditional values had been wiped out” (Ramazani & Stallworthy, 2012, p. 2018). Within this extraordinary context, poetry served as a “complete understanding of the First World War because, in the years leading up to and including the war, poetry played a central role in public and private life” (Ruzich, 2021, p. 1). British poets such as Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) and Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) experienced the harsh realities of war firsthand, vividly portraying them in their work. In contrast, poets such as Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) and Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917) wrote patriotic poetry that celebrated heroism and national pride. Inevitably, the outbreak of the First World War in Britain brought a wave of patriotic literature, permeated with nationalistic enthusiasm and an idealized vision of sacrifice for England, reflecting the pervasive sense of Englishness intertwined with the imperial and colonial attitudes.

This paper examines Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1914) to disclose the underlying assumptions about Englishness and imperialism and to reveal the contradictions inherent in these representations. By deconstructing the romantic nationalism celebrated in the poem, the study exposes how the glorification of wartime sacrifice serves to reinforce notions of cultural superiority and colonial domination. The analysis points out how the idealization of England as a virtuous and nurturing motherland embodies the cultural arrogance and moral superiority characteristic of British colonialism. The significance of this research lies in understanding how Brooke’s poetry mediates Britain’s imperialist ideologies by propagating its colonial hegemony. The study aims to contribute ~~contributes~~ to postcolonial studies by revisiting the work of a canonical English poet such as Rupert Brooke from a postcolonial perspective challenging traditional literary criticism that has overlooked the imperialist implications in Brooke’s poetry.

“The Soldier” is generally celebrated for its dramatic depiction of patriotic sacrifice during World War I. It reflects a romanticised vision of dying for one’s country, where the fallen soldier becomes eternally entwined with the English landscape. The First World War, viewed through a Eurocentric perspective, had effective implications for colonial subjects and their lands. In this respect, it is worth noting that Jon Silkin’s analysis of Rupert Brooke’s sonnets, particularly “The Soldier”, rests on several ideological foundations. Stallworthy (1990) believes that “Rupert Brooke is not a War Poet”, rather “he is a poet of peace, a celebrant of friendship, love, and laughter” (p. 193). Unlike Stallworthy, Silkin (1998) defines Brooke’s sonnets as “war poems” since they serve as “vehicles for imperialist attitudes” (p. 67). He (1998) furthers his argument as follows,

Brooke’s sonnets purport to be, a defense of war’s necessity, or at least a plea for the waging of efficient war, given its necessity. The contrast is significant. Brooke’s poems begin with the context of war but move into a peaceful idealization of the sacrifice pending its immortality. Death in a aura of public sympathy, but underlying approval, provides the ennobling quality that was privately satisfying. (Silkin, 1998, p. 67)

Obviously, Silkin’s suggestion is based on the idea that Brooke’s sonnets reflect an imperialist and idealised view of war that emphasises patriotic sacrifice and public approval while ignoring the harsh realities of combat and thus the true nature of war. Boyle, on the other hand, explains Brooke as “a patriot, welcoming the war for the opportunities it provided for simplifying his romantic life and romanticising the world, describing it – like so many others at the time – as a chance to cleanse himself” (Boyle, 2015, p. 8). Similarly, Walter (2006) believes that Brooke’s poetry “had awakened the nation from its pre-war decadence and given it a heaven-sent opportunity to purge its peacetime sins” (p. 17). Brooke’s poetry, on the other hand, was influenced by the wider cultural background. Indeed, at the beginning of the war, there was a broad enthusiasm and conviction

for the good cause. Brooke's work, with its idealism and emotional appeal, effectively reflected this mood. His poems were published and endorsed by important figures such as Winston Churchill, who admired them and even memorised some of them (Bloom, 2003, p. 44).

Literature Review

This literature explores the existing scholarship on Brooke's work, focusing on postcolonial perspectives that reveal the colonial mindset embedded within the poem. "The Soldier" is an illustrative example of wartime poetry that encapsulates the idealistic nationalism prevalent during the First World War. Paul Fussell (1975) in *The Great War and Modern Memory* discusses the role of the poem in promoting a sentimental view of war. Fussell (1975) explains that in Brooke's "The Soldier" "one of England's main attractions is that she provides 'flowers to love'" since the inclusion of flowers is a "standard form of the Georgian poem" (p. 243). Indeed, "The Soldier" romanticises England and depicts it as a pastoral paradise offering beauty and comfort, symbolised by "flowers to love".

Similarly, Johnston (1964) argues that in "The Soldier", Brooke conveys that his personal understanding of the world is worth sacrificing his life for (p. 34). However, "he does not say, nor should he be given credit for saying, that the values of his world are those of the nation, morally aroused and conscious, in a dim, inarticulate way, of historical necessity" (Johnston, 1964, p. 34). Johnson's interpretation of "The Soldier" suggests that even if there is an underlying acknowledgment of England's role in history or morality, it remains vague. He believes that Brooke's poem is more about his personal connection to his homeland than a conscious reflection on England's moral or historical significance (Johnston, 1964, p. 34). On the other hand, Hühn (2016) characterizes Brooke's "The Soldier" as a patriotic poem and describes it as "unquestioned confidence in collective integration, personal preservation and permanent heroic remembrance" and "the shattering experience of the sordid inhumane destructiveness of war is suppressed" in the poem (p. 180). In addition to the interpretations described above, Brooke's idealization of England is closely interwoven with the imperialist ideologies of the time. In this context, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), emphasizes the way literature can reflect and reinforce imperialist attitudes (p. xiii). Brooke's poem, with its assertion that a piece of foreign land can become "forever England," illustrates the colonial pretensions of British imperialism. This notion of cultural and territorial superiority is consistent with what Said (1993) describes as missionary enthusiasm of imperialism, in which the coloniser's culture is considered superior and thus destined to dominate and civilise the colonised. Moreover, the idealization of England in Brooke's "The Soldier" is a significant aspect of its imperialist ideology. The depiction of England's virtues – its flowers, air, and rivers – serves to create a sense of inherent moral and cultural superiority. Likewise, Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) suggests that this narrative constructs a dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized, positioning the former as inherently virtuous and the latter as inferior (p. 185). Brooke's portrayal of the soldier's death as a sacrifice under the "English heaven" not only glorifies the soldier but also morally justifies colonial expansion and warfare (Greenblatt and Abrams, 2007, p. 1956).

Furthermore, the ethical implications of colonialism, ignored in patriotic war poetry, are crucial for a postcolonial critique of Brooke's work. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1961/1963) emphasises the brutal realities of colonialism, including violence, exploitation and the dehumanisation of the colonised. Similarly, by neglecting these aspects, Brooke's "The Soldier" (1914) becomes a form of cultural hegemony that confirms the colonial status quo. By idealising England and ignoring the experiences of the colonised, the poem upholds the cultural superiority and moral justification that underpin British imperialism. This perspective challenges the traditional readings of the poem, exposing the colonial pretensions and ethical blind spots that it perpetuates.

A postcolonial critique of “The Soldier” offers a contextual and critical understanding of its place in the literary and historical context of the First World War. It allows contemporary critics to move beyond its conventional patriotic interpretation, highlighting the implicit assumptions about empire, nationalism, and colonial identity. In this respect, Adrian Caesar (1993) argues that Brooke’s desire to be commemorated as “a body of England’s, breathing English air” (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019) demonstrates an attitude of “racial, and implicitly racist arrogance”, which he believes is self-evident (p. 54). Despite its potential to shed light on the colonial implications of Brooke’s work, the poem has been largely overlooked in postcolonial scholarship, and very little research has been conducted in this direction.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The study applies a postcolonial critical approach to analyse Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1914). This method involves examining the language, imagery and thematic elements of the poem to explore the underlying imperialist ideologies. The study focuses on key phrases and symbols that illustrate patriotic enthusiasm and the glorification of dying for one’s country. The analysis draws on postcolonial theory to help identify and interpret the implicit messages in the poem that are consistent with British imperialism. More specifically, the research utilizes concepts such as Eurocentrism, imperial ideology, the “civilizing mission”, and colonial glorification to place the poem in the postcolonial context of empire, culture and identity. By juxtaposing the content of the poem with postcolonial theory, the study demonstrates how Brooke’s portrayal of England as a virtuous, almost saintly being serves to justify colonial expansion and warfare. The analysis also examines how the idealisation of England and the death of the soldier as a noble sacrifice under the English sky marginalises the experiences of colonised peoples and reinforces a narrative of Britain’s cultural superiority. Furthermore, postcolonial criticism helps to show how “The Soldier” fits into the broader patterns of jingoistic literature that legitimised colonial ideologies. This nuanced reading positions “The Soldier” as a cultural artifact that sustains the ideological machinery of British imperialism through elements such as nationalism, identity, and colonialism in early 20th-century literature. The postcolonial reading of the poem, therefore, draws largely on the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and other contemporary postcolonial critics, arguing that the celebration of England in Brooke’s “The Soldier” serves as an implication of cultural and moral superiority.

A Postcolonial Critique of Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier”

“The Soldier” was written in 1914, at a time when the British Empire was at its height. From a postcolonial perspective, this poem can be examined in terms of colonial discourse, nationalism, and the romanticization of imperialist ideology. This analysis therefore seeks to disclose the colonial implications and how Brooke’s poem upholds and glorifies the British Empire. Brooke’s depiction of the soldier’s death as a noble and patriotic act can be seen as a reflection of imperial ideology. The poem celebrates the idea of England as a mother country worth dying for. This was a common sentiment used to justify colonial expansion and rule. Unsurprisingly, Brooke’s first title for the poem was “The Recruit” (Bloom, 2003, p. 16). “The Soldier” is a sonnet structured in the Italian (or Petrarchan) form, which consists of an octave (the first eight lines) followed by a sestet (the last six lines). This structure not only characterises the formal aspects of the poem but also influences its rhetorical development. In examining the imperial implications in the poem, this structure helps to understand how Brooke conveys patriotic and nationalist sentiments that artistically promote imperialist ideals.

“The Soldier” embodies complex relationships with notions of Englishness and postcolonialism. It deals with themes such as national identity and patriotism, hence the opening lines, “If I should die, think only this of me: That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England,” which encapsulates a sentiment of noble

sacrifice and eternal national pride (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). The idea that a soldier's death on foreign soil could transform it into a piece of England highlights the imperialist view of the world that characterized the British Empire during Brooke's era. This perspective, when scrutinized through a postcolonial framework, reveals the inherent cultural superiority and colonial pretensions that the poem implicitly propagates. Moreover, the act of claiming a part of the world as eternally English encapsulates the imperialist mindset, wherein colonized territories are regarded as extensions of the English homeland.

The above attitude is consistent with Edward W. Said's idea of "overseas rule", which he explains as "jumping beyond adjacent territories to very distant lands" describing it as a "privileged status" for the British Empire (1993, p. xxiii). According to Said (1993), "there is something systematic" about Britain's imperial culture, which "has a lot to do with projections, whether in fiction or geography or art, and it acquires a continuous presence through actual expansion, administration, investment, and commitment" (p. xxiii). Based on the above reasoning, Said defines imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory", whereas colonialism is "almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (1993, p. 9). "The Soldier" incorporates the above aspects of both imperialism and colonialism since the poem reflects the widespread cultural investment in empire and the projection of British identity onto distant lands, which, in turn, resonates with Said's descriptions of the systematic and privileged nature of British imperial culture.

On the other hand, cultural hegemony heavily propagated in "The Soldier" is also exemplified through the deep-seated patriotism associated with the British Empire. Brooke's depiction of the soldier's death as a noble contribution to England's global presence highlights the 'privileged status' of the British Empire. The poem conveys an idealized view of sacrifice for the empire, illustrating the perceived honour and privilege of being part of an imperial power that Said discusses. Moreover, the sentiment of glorifying such sacrifice refers to jingoistic attitudes prevalent during the early stages of World War I, when nationalistic enthusiasm overshadowed the harsh realities of war. Brooke depicts the imperialist mindset through the portrayal of England as a benevolent force whose influence is exclusively positive: "A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, / Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam" (1914/2012, p. 2019). Miller (2017) explains that what Brooke, as a poet-soldier, is trying to achieve in his war poetry is "the increasing conventionality of his patriotic sentiments" and that for him, "jingoism was not jingoism if it was recognised as such by its author" (p. 44). This is evident in "The Soldier", where Brooke attempts to elevate his patriotic feelings above mere propaganda, which sounds disingenuous and manipulative in terms of postcolonial criticism.

Along with the jingoist attitude, Brooke's emphasis on the inherent virtues of England highlights the cultural arrogance and superiority characterising British colonialism: "A body of England's, breathing English air, / Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home" (1914/2012, p. 2019). The poet underscores the idea of Englishness through the nurturing qualities of England, portraying the country as a mother figure that shapes and enriches the lives of its people. The outbreak of the First World War inspired Rupert Brooke to create literary works that instilled patriotism and encouraged voluntary recruitment. Nevertheless, the idea of Englishness was always present in Brooke's poetry. In his pre-war poem "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" (1912), for example, Brooke depicts a homesick traveller idealising the past and recounting the natural beauty of his homeland (Reisman, 2012, p. 78). Indeed, the themes of place and sentiment are prevalent in his works (p. 78). In "The Soldier", this approach is permeated by the extended metaphor of England with which the poet romanticises and elevates England and English identity. Mayhew (2024) explains that,

Although Englishness and Britishness were closely intertwined in this period, men were driven by a 'defensive patriotism' that was frequently constructed around their specific 'English' identity... Men acknowledged that their local patriotism formed an important part of a patchwork of Britishness. Regimental magazines and the soldiers (both officers and men) often used 'England' as a proxy for Britain. They shared some characteristics with other groups in the British Isles, and across the British Empire, but expressions of Britishness or imperialism were generally focused on a conscious 'othering' of the enemy, different groups, and different ethnicities. (pp. 27-28)

Many soldiers and civilians in England saw their English identity as a fundamental part of the broader British identity. Their perception of patriotism was centred around their English identity, focusing on a more localized sense of belonging and duty. In "The Soldier", the idea of belonging and attachment is expressed through descriptions such as "for ever England", "a dust whom England bore", "breathing English air", "blessed by suns of home", and "English heaven" (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). Brooke's depiction of England as a perfect and idyllic homeland mirrors imperial ideology, where the mother country is superior and virtuous. This romantic view disregards the darker aspects of colonialism.

Through its idealised depiction of England and cultural superiority, "The Soldier" also reflects Eurocentric implications, as the poem expresses a deep bond between the soldier and his homeland, elevating English identity above others and portraying them as noble and universal. The assertion that England can claim foreign fields into "for ever England" propagates the belief that English culture and values are superior and can civilize other lands, ignoring the identities of those regions (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). This colonial glorification is due to the fact that Eurocentrism creates "regimes of hierarchical certainty", in which European culture and knowledge prevail (McLennan, 2006, p. 85). However, as McLennan (2006) argues, these hierarchies are rhetorical constructs and the presence of the "Other" as a constant foil exposes the fragility of the colonizer's claims to power (p. 85). Moreover, the "rhetorical presence of the 'Other' is figured not only as colonized, weak and silenced, but also as feared, forbidden and threatening" (McLennan, 2006, p. 85). This phenomenon can also be observed in "The Soldier" in the sense that Brooke's idealization of England represents the hierarchical framework, in which England's identity is constructed in opposition to and at the expense of the "Other". Accordingly, the desire to make a foreign land "for ever England" can be read as a response to the perceived threat of cultural or geographical otherness. According to Franz Fanon (1961/1963), "colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's mind of all form and content"; rather, it twists, disfigures, and destroys the people's past using a perverse logic (p. 210). When the speaker in "The Soldier" declares that wherever he dies, a "corner of a foreign field" will forever remain "England", this suggests a form of colonial possession that goes beyond death, which is consistent with Fanon's observation of colonialism's attempt to impose its narrative and identity on others, in this case by claiming foreign lands as extensions of England (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). The poem assumes that the foreign land is a metaphorical piece of England, which in turn means that the culture of the original inhabitants is silenced. Hence, "The Soldier" represents a colonial attitude that not only claims possession of foreign lands but also replaces their cultural and historical identities with an idealised representation of the colonizer's homeland.

Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), argues that with "the restrictive notions of cultural identity, we burden our visions of political change" (p. 55). As a result, the awkward division between Black/White and Self/Other is "disturbed with one brief pause and the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed, whenever they are found to rest in the narcissistic myths of negritude or white cultural supremacy" (pp. 57-58). Bhabha highlights the conventional and simplistic dichotomies used to categorize race and identity criticizing the reliance on grand narratives or myths that serve to glorify or centralize specific identities. When the established traditional binaries are disturbed, this signifies a breakdown of fixed identifications thereby leading to a more fluid perception of identity. This stance challenges the rigid, romanticized notion of

Englishness in “The Soldier” and encourages a consideration of the fluid, hybrid nature of cultural identities and the ambivalences intrinsic in nationalist sentiments. In the poem, Brooke constructs a singular, pure English identity: “If I should die, think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England” (1914/2012, p. 2019). This excerpt demonstrates a belief in the permanence and purity of English identity, even in foreign lands. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity challenges this notion, suggesting that the English identity the soldier carries is not untouched by the cultures he interacts with abroad. On the other hand, the “corner of a foreign field” could be seen as a space where identities interact, contrary to the idea of it remaining “for ever England” (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019).

In addition, “The Soldier” (1914/2012) expresses unwavering patriotism, particularly in the lines “A body of England's, breathing English air, / Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home” (Brooke, p. 2019). The soldier’s unquestioning patriotism might mask deeper ambivalence about the war and the nature of national identity. This line could be revisited to explore potential uncertainties in the soldier’s sense of self, shaped by the realities of war and the interaction of different cultures and identities on the battlefield. Bhabha (1994) defines this as the “Third Space”, which subverts the Western narrative that culture is a “homogenizing and unifying force” (p. 54). This is illustrated in the setting of “The Soldier” which suggests a separation of English identity from the foreign land where the soldier may die: “In that rich earth a richer dust concealed; / A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, / Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam” (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). These lines imply that English identity remains unchanged even when physically in a foreign land. However, from Bhabha’s perspective, the “richer dust” in foreign earth symbolizes not just a piece of England but a merging of English and foreign elements, creating a hybrid identity that challenges the poem’s notion of a static, singular national identity. The line “in that rich earth a richer dust concealed” suggests a transformation where Englishness is enriched by its placement within a non-English environment (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019). The second part of the poem emphasizes idealized English identity:

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven. (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019)

By interpreting the above lines through Franz Fanon’s perspectives, the underlying themes of colonial ideology, nationalism, and the romanticization of empire emerge. Franz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/1963), criticises the way colonial powers romanticise their own culture and identity by “placing white culture in opposition to the other noncultures” thereby presenting them as superior and innately virtuous (p. 150). In “The Soldier” (1914), Brooke conveys this idea by praising that English values and experiences are universally virtuous and transcendental. Indeed, the poem celebrates the idea of Englishness as pure and eternal. The soldier’s heart, having “shed away all evil”, becomes part of an “eternal mind” that represents the best of English culture and values. The soldier’s death is described as a noble act that perpetuates the thoughts, dreams, and values of England. The romanticized depiction of English culture ignores the injustices of colonial domination by imposing the colonial narrative that justifies colonial rule.

Likewise, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said discusses “a counterpoint between overt patterns in British writing about Britain and representations of the world beyond the British Isles” and explains that “the inherent mode for this counterpoint is not temporal but spatial” (p. 81). To do so, as Said (1993) points out, “writers use “striking but careful strategies, many of them derived from expected sources – positive ideas of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behavior, moral values” (p. 81). It can be seen that “The Soldier”

follows a similar approach expressed in the lines “dreams happy as her day” and “an English heaven” which suggest a pure and eternal connection between the soldier and England and depict England as a utopian space (Brooke 1914/2012, p. 2019). This vision ignores the realities and consequences of imperialism, presenting England as a benign and benevolent force. Moreover, Said’s observation explaining the so-called civilising mission that almost all colonial schemes begin with the assumption of the backwardness of the natives and their general incapacity to be independent, “equal” and capable is echoed in “The Soldier” (1993, p. 80). The soldier’s sacrifice helps to uphold and preserve English values and the English way of life. Furthermore, the idea that the soldier’s spirit contributes to an “eternal mind” implies that English values are universal and timeless (Brooke, 1914/2012, p. 2019).

Conclusion

The analysis of Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1914) within a postcolonial framework reveals significant findings related to the underlying imperialist ideologies in the poem and its role in the spread of British colonial hegemony. Brooke’s poem, widely celebrated for its patriotic enthusiasm and idealised vision of wartime sacrifice, epitomises the romantic nationalism prevalent during the First World War. A critical examination, however, discloses the correspondence with imperialist discourse centred on notions of cultural superiority and colonial domination.

Brooke’s portrayal of the soldier’s death as a noble act serves to glorify the British Empire and its expansionist ambitions. The depiction of England as a virtuous and nurturing motherland, worth dying for, highlights the cultural arrogance and sense of moral superiority that characterised British colonialism. By idealizing England and depicting the soldier’s sacrifice as a transcendental contribution to the eternal values of the nation, the poem marginalizes the experiences of the colonised and ignores the brutal realities of colonialism.

The postcolonial critique exposes the contradictions inherent in Brooke’s representation of Englishness and imperialism. The romanticization of England as a pastoral paradise and its assertion that a piece of foreign land can become “for ever England” illustrate the colonial pretensions of British imperialism. This perspective is consistent with Edward Said’s concept of cultural and territorial superiority, where the colonizer’s culture is regarded as superior and destined to dominate the colonized.

Moreover, Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity challenges the fixed, romanticized depiction of English identity in “The Soldier”. The insistence on the permanence and purity of English identity, even in foreign lands, disregards the fluid and hybrid nature of cultural identities shaped by colonial encounters. Bhabha’s concept of the “Third Space” emphasizes the interaction of cultures, challenging the portrayal of a static and homogenous national identity in the poem.

Frantz Fanon’s critique of the colonizer’s romanticization of their own culture further unfolds the ethical blind spots in “The Soldier”. The celebration of English values as universally virtuous and the soldier’s contribution to an “eternal mind” perpetuate the colonial narrative that justifies imperial rule. This romanticized depiction of English culture also ignores the injustices and violence peculiar to colonial domination.

To conclude, “The Soldier” illustrates the pervasive influence of imperialist ideologies in wartime poetry. By revisiting Brooke’s work through a postcolonial viewpoint, this analysis challenges traditional literary criticism, which refers to more conventional approaches based on formalist, aesthetic or patriotic readings. More specifically, “The Soldier” reiterates the romanticized portrayal of war, patriotism and idealized national identity. The study emphasises the role of the poem in strengthening British colonial hegemony and thus points to the importance of critical perspectives in understanding the cultural and historical contexts that shape

literary works. Brooke's idealization of Englishness and patriotic sacrifice, while resonant with contemporary sentiments, ultimately serves to take sides with the cultural superiority and moral justification defining British imperialism. This critique invites a re-evaluation of canonical works, encouraging a more scrupulous and critical engagement with the literature of the First World War and its imperialist implications.

References

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Bloom, H. (2003). *Poets of World War I: Rupert Brooke & Siegfried Sassoon*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Boyle, D. (2015). *Rupert Brooke: England's last patriot*. London: Endeavour Press.
- Brooke, R. (2012). The Soldier. In S. Greenblatt & M. H. Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Vol. 2* (p. 2019, Original work published 1914). New York & London: WW Norton & Company.
- Caesar, A. (1993). *Taking it like a man: suffering, sexuality, and the war poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. (R. Philcox, Trans., Original work published 1961). New York: Grove Press.
- Fussel, P. (1975). *The Great War and modern memory*. New York & London: Oxford University Press.
- Hühn, P. (2016). *Facing loss and death: narrative and eventfulness in lyric poetry* (Vol. 55). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Johnston, J. H. (1964). *English poetry of the First World War: A study in the evolution of lyric and narrative form*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Mayhew, A. (2024). *Making sense of the Great War: Crisis, Englishness, and Morale on the Western Front*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McLennan, G. (2006). *Sociological cultural studies: Reflexivity and positivity in the human sciences*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miller, A. (2017). *Rupert Brooke in the First World War*. Clemson: Clemson University Press.
- Ramazani, J., & Stallworthy, J. (2012). Voices from World War I. In S. Greenblatt & M. H. Abrams (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Vol. 2* (pp. 2016-2018). New York & London: WW Norton & Company.
- Reisman, R. M. C. (2012). *Critical Survey of Poetry: War Poets*. Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press.

- Stallworthy, J. (1990). Who was Rupert Brooke? *Critical Survey*, 2(2), 185-193. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4155527>
- Ruzich, C. M. (2021). Introduction. In C. M. Ruzich (Ed.) *International Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology of Lost Voices* (pp. 1-16). London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
- Silkin, J. (1998). *Out of battle: The poetry of the Great War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walter, G. (Ed.). (2006). *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*. London: Penguin UK.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Rupert Brooke'un "Asker" (1914) adlı şiirini postkolonyal bir perspektiften inceleyerek şiirin alt metinlerinde yer alan emperyalist ideolojileri açığa çıkarmaktır. Araştırma, Brooke'un şiirinin dönemin emperyalist ideolojilerini nasıl yansıttığını ve sürdürdüğünü belirleyerek, İngiliz sömürge hegemonyasının yayılmasındaki rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Şiirde idealize edilen romantik milliyetçiliği yapıbozuma uğratan bu çalışma, savaş zamanı fedakârlığının yüceltilmesinin kültürel üstünlük ve sömürgeci tahakküm kavramlarını nasıl pekiştirdiğini ortaya koyuyor. İngiltere'nin erdemli ve besleyici bir anavatan olarak idealize edilmesinin, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin karakteristik kültürel kibir ve ahlaki üstünlüğünü nasıl somutlaştırdığını vurgulayan inceleme, Brooke'un eserlerindeki emperyalist imaları görmezden gelen geleneksel edebiyat eleştirisine meydan okuyor. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha ve Frantz Fanon gibi önde gelen postkolonyal akademisyenlerin teorilerini bir araya getiren bu çalışma, İngiliz kimliğinin sabit ve romantikleştirilmiş tasvirini sorgulayarak şiirin kültürel ve tarihsel bağlamının daha derinlemesine anlaşılmasını sağlıyor.

Tasarım ve Yöntem

Bu araştırma, Rupert Brooke'un "Asker" (1914) adlı şiirini postkolonyal bir teorik çerçevede analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Metodoloji, metin analizi, teorik uygulama ve eleştirel bağlamsallaştırma olmak üzere birkaç aşamadan oluşmaktadır. Çalışma, şiirin dili, imgeleri ve tematik içeriğine odaklanarak, askerin ölümü, İngiltere'nin tasviri ve savaş zamanı fedakârlığının kavramsallaştırılmasına özel dikkat göstermektedir. Metinsel analiz üzerine inşa edilen araştırma, şiirin altında yatan ideolojileri sorgulamak için önemli postkolonyal teorileri kullanmaktadır.

Edward Said'in kültürel ve bölgesel üstünlük kavramı, şiirin İngiliz kültürel egemenliği ve sömürgeci haklar anlatısını nasıl inşa ettiğini incelemek için bir çerçeve sunar. Homi Bhabha'nın melezlik ve "Üçüncü Alan" kavramları, şiirin sabit ve homojen bir İngiliz kimliği tasvirini eleştirmek ve sömürgeci karşılaşmalarla şekillenen kültürel kimliklerin akışkan ve melez doğasını vurgulamak için kullanılır. Frantz Fanon'un sömürgecinin kendi kültürünü romantikleştirmesine yönelik eleştirisi, şiirin İngiliz değerlerini yüceltmesinde yer alan etik kör noktaları ve sömürgeci gerekçeleri ortaya çıkarmak için kullanılmaktadır.

Çalışma, Brooke'un "Asker" şiirini Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve İngiliz emperyalizminin daha geniş tarihsel ve kültürel bağlamına yerleştirmektedir. Araştırma, vatanseverlik coşkusu ve ülkesi için ölmenin yüceltilmesini gösteren anahtar ifadeler ve sembollere odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, milliyetçilik, vatanseverlik ve sömürgeciliğe yönelik çağdaş tutumlar ve bu duyguların Brooke'un şiirine nasıl yansıdığı ve pekiştirildiği incelenmektedir. Araştırma, şiiri tarihsel bağlamına oturtarak, metni dönemin emperyalist ideolojilerini nasıl yansıtmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda yaydığını da göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Netice itibariyle, metinsel, kuramsal ve bağlamsal analizlerden elde edilen sonuçlar, "Asker" şiirinin kapsamlı bir eleştirisini oluşturmak üzere sentezlenmektedir. Bu, bulguların postkolonyal teori ışığında yorumlanmasını ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı şiirinin kültürel ve ideolojik boyutlarını ve İngiliz sömürge hegemonyasını güçlendirmedeki rolünü anlamak için daha geniş çıkarımların ifade edilmesini içermektedir.

Bulgular

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başlangıcında yazılan Brooke'un "Asker" (1914) adlı şiiri, vatanseverlik coşkusu ve ülkesi için ölmenin yüceltilmesiyle kutlanmaktadır. Ancak postkolonyal bir perspektiften bakıldığında, Brooke'un döneminde yaygın olan kolonyal zihniyetin bir ifadesi olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Şiirin vatansever ve idealize edilmiş savaş zamanı fedakârlık vizyonu, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin kültürel üstünlüğünü ve ahlaki gerekçelerini desteklemektedir. Şiir, askerin ölümünü asil bir eylem olarak tasvir ederek İngiliz İmparatorluğu'nu yüceltmekte ve İngiltere'yi uğruna ölmeye değer erdemli bir anavatan olarak tanıtmaktadır. Bu tasvir, İngiliz sömürgeciliğine özgü kültürel kibir ve ahlaki üstünlük duygusunu vurgulamaktadır.

Şiir, sömürgeleştirilenlerin deneyimlerini marjinalleştirip sömürgeciliğin acımasız gerçeklerini önemsemeyerek, İngiliz değerlerinin idealleştirilmesine ve askerin fedakarlığına odaklanmaktadır. İngiltere'yi pastoral bir cennet olarak romantikleştirmesi ve yabancı toprakların "sonsuz dek İngiltere" olabileceği düşüncesi, sömürgeci iddiaları yansıtmaktadır. Şiir, İngiltere'nin çiçekleri, havası ve nehirleri gibi doğal erdemlerini vurgulayarak, İngilizlerin algılanan kültürel üstünlüğünü pekiştiren bir kültürel hegemonya anlatısını sürdürür. Bu idealleştirme, dönemin jingoist tutumlarıyla uyumlu bir şekilde, sömürgeci yayılmayı ve savaşı ahlaki açıdan meşrulaştırmaya hizmet eder. Bu seçici anlatı, emperyal projeyi sterilize etmekte ve onun şiddet ve baskı içeren yönlerini görmezden gelmektedir.

Edward Said'in kültürel ve bölgesel üstünlük kavramıyla örtüşen bu düşünceler, Homi Bhabha'nın melezlik kavramıyla ise çatışmaktadır. Bhabha, şiirin katı ve romantikleştirilmiş İngiliz kimliği tasvirine meydan okuyarak, sömürgeci karşılaşmalarla şekillenen kültürel kimliklerin akışkan ve melez doğasını vurgular. Frantz Fanon'un, sömürgeci güçlerin kültürünün romantikleştirilmesine yönelik eleştirisi, Brooke'un şiirindeki sömürgeci anlatının etik kör noktalarını aydınlatmaktadır. "Asker" şiirinin postkolonyal eleştirisi, emperyalist ideolojilerin savaş zamanı şiirindeki etkisini ortaya koymakta ve geleneksel edebiyat eleştirisine meydan okumaktadır. Brooke'un İngilizliği ve vatansever fedakârlığı idealize etmesi, çağdaş duygularla yankı bulsa da nihayetinde İngiliz emperyalizmini tanımlayan kültürel üstünlük ve ahlaki gerekçenin yanında yer alır.

Sınırlılıklar

Bu çalışma, Rupert Brooke'un "Asker" (1914) adlı eserinin alt metinlerinde yer alan emperyalist ideolojilere dair önemli bulgular sunarken, sınırlılıkları da yok değildir. Bu kısıtlamaların başında tek bir şiire odaklanması gelmektedir. "Asker", Birinci Dünya Savaşı şiirinin mükemmel bir örneği olsa da Brooke'un veya diğer çağdaş şairlerin başka şiirlerini analiz etmek, dönemin edebi ortamı ve emperyalist temelleri hakkında daha kapsamlı bir anlayış sağlayabilir.

Çalışmada sunulan tarihsel ve kültürel bağlam öncelikle İngiliz sömürgeciliğine ve onunla ilişkili ideolojilere odaklanmıştır. Bu odaklanma, daha geniş jeopolitik dinamikleri ve diğer sömürge ve savaş zamanı bağlamlarının farklı deneyimlerini gözden kaçırabilir. Daha küresel bir bakış açısı, farklı sömürge anlatılarının ve emperyalizme verilen çeşitli tepkilerin birbirine bağlılığını vurgulayabilir.

Ayrıca, çağdaş okuyucuların “Asker” şiirini nasıl yorumladığını anlamak, şiirin kalıcı etkisi ve emperyalist ideolojilerin edebi alımlamadaki kalıcılığı hakkında değerli bilgiler sağlayabilir. Bütün bu sınırlamalara rağmen, çalışma Brooke’un eserine yönelik önemli bir postkolonyal eleştiri sunmakta ve savaş zamanı şiirinin ve emperyalist sonuçlarının daha fazla araştırılmasını ve yeniden değerlendirilmesini teşvik etmektedir.

Öneriler

Rupert Brooke’un “Asker” (1914) şiirine postkolonyal eleştiriye de dahil ederek yeni bir bakış açısı sunan bu çalışmanın teorik çıkarımları oldukça derindir. Bu yaklaşım, şiiri ağırlıklı olarak vatansever ve milliyetçi coşkusuyla kutlayan geleneksel edebi yorumlara meydan okumaktadır. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha ve Frantz Fanon’un kuramlarını uygulayan çalışma, kültürel üstünlük ve sömürgeci tahakküm gibi şiirin altında yatan emperyalist ideolojileri ortaya çıkarıyor. Bu eleştiri, sömürgecilik sonrası edebiyat çalışmalarının daha geniş bir alanına katkıda bulunarak, kanonik eserlerin sömürgeci hegemonyaları pekiştirmedeki suç ortaklıklarını ortaya çıkaran eleştirel merceklerle incelenmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Pratik olarak, bu çalışma eğitimcileri, edebiyat eleştirmenlerini ve öğrencileri savaş zamanı şiirini ve diğer edebi eserleri analiz ederken daha eleştirel ve kapsayıcı bir yaklaşım benimsemeye teşvik etmektedir. Postkolonyal perspektiflerin müfredata entegre edilmesini savunmakta, böylece edebiyatın tarihsel ve kültürel bağlamlardaki rolünün daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını teşvik etmektedir. Ayrıca araştırma, edebiyat antolojilerinin ve eğitim materyallerinin, ünlü eserlerin emperyalist temellerini ele alan eleştirileri içerecek şekilde gözden geçirilmesi gerektiğini öne sürüyor. Bu değişim, daha dengeli ve incelikli bir edebiyat eğitimi teşvik edebilir ve öğrencileri yüzeysel yorumların ötesinde edebiyatla eleştirel bir şekilde ilgilenecek araçlarla donatabilir.

Bu çalışmanın sosyal sonuçları, kültürel anlatıların ve ulusal kimliklerin edebiyat yoluyla nasıl inşa edildiği ve yayıldığına yeniden değerlendirilmesini gerektirdiği için önemlidir. Araştırma, “Asker” şiirindeki sömürgeci ideolojileri açığa çıkararak, edebi söylemde sömürgeleştirilmiş halkların marjinalleştirilmesi ve silinmesinin tanınması ve ele alınmasının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu farkındalık, emperyalizmi tarihsel olarak meşrulaştıran kültürel kibir ve ahlaki üstünlüğün sürdürülmesine meydan okuyarak daha fazla kültürel duyarlılık ve kapsayıcılığı teşvik edebilir. Nihayetinde bu çalışma, kültürel mirasla daha eşitlikçi ve eleştirel bir ilişkiyi teşvik ederek sosyal adaleti ve ulusal kimlik ile tarihsel hafızanın karmaşıklığının daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlayacaktır.

Özgün Değer

Bu çalışma, Rupert Brooke’un “Asker” (1914) adlı şiirinin emperyalist ideolojilerini ve İngiliz sömürge hegemonyasını desteklemedeki rolünü ortaya çıkararak özgün ve otantik bir postkolonyal analiz sunmaktadır. Geleneksel olarak vatansever ve milliyetçi coşkusıyla kutlanan Brooke’un şiiri, postkolonyal bir perspektiften kapsamlı bir şekilde eleştirilmemiştir. Bu araştırma, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha ve Frantz Fanon’un eleştirel teorilerini uygulayarak bu boşluğu doldurmakta ve şiirin kültürel ve ideolojik temellerine dair yeni bulgu ve algılar sunmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın özgünlüğü, ayrıntılı metin analizi, kuramsal uygulama ve tarihsel bağlamsallaştırmayı içeren özenli metodolojisiyle pekiştirilmiştir. “Asker” şiirinin dilini ve temalarını titizlikle inceleyen ve şiiri Birinci Dünya Savaşı edebiyatı ve İngiliz emperyalizmi bağlamına yerleştiren araştırma, şiirin kültürel üstünlük ve

sömürgeci egemenlik kavramlarını nasıl sürdürdüğüne dair incelikli bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Postkolonyal teorilerin uygulanması, İngiliz kimliğinin geleneksel olarak romantikleştirilmesine meydan okuyarak ve kolonyal karşılaşmalarla şekillenen kültürel kimliklerin akışkan ve melez doğasını vurgulayarak eleştiriye daha da derinlik katmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın değeri, geleneksel edebiyat eleştirisine meydan okuma ve onu genişletme becerisinde yatmaktadır. Araştırma, Brooke'un eserlerinin altında yatan emperyalist ideolojileri açığa çıkararak, kanonik edebiyatın sömürgecilik ve kültürel tahakkümün karmaşıklığını kabul eden eleştirel bir perspektiften yeniden değerlendirilmesini teşvik etmektedir. Bu yaklaşım sadece Brooke'un şiirinin anlaşılmasını geliştirmekle kalmıyor, aynı zamanda postkolonyal edebiyat çalışmalarının daha geniş bir alanına da katkıda bulunuyor.

Araştırmacı Katkısı: Yakut AKBAY (%100).