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### THE NOTION OF CITY IN PRIESTLEY'S ENGLISH JOURNEY

# PRIESTLEY'İN ENGLISH JOURNEY ESERİNDE ŞEHİR ALGISI

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#### Abstract

Many writers aim to tell about their journeys and observations on these journeys. Narrating his journeys and his observations on the cities, John Boynton Priestley provides his style of perspective on English cities and the urbanization in his work English Journey (1933). It is significant to emphasize the perspective of the author about the cities of England, the notion about the city he features and the observations he reflects. The literary characteristics of the author and the motives that lead him to the journey will be emphasized in this study. Space concept will be explained for the analysis of the notion of the city. Literary journalism will be explained. The conditions of the English cities, the approach of the writer towards these cities, his typical notion of city he points out in the work will be analyzed. Finally, in the study, Priestley's approach to early 20<sup>th</sup> century England, cities and elements he emphasizes in the context of notion of the city will be revealed.

Keywords: Priestley, England, City, Travel, Literature

Öz

Gerçekleştirdikleri seyahatleri ve bu seyahatlerdeki gözlemlerini ifade etmek isteyen birçok yazar farklı dönemlerde farklı eserler ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu bağlamda English Journey (1933) ile John Boynton Priestley 20. Yüzyıl başlarında İngiltere'de gerçekleştirdiği seyahatleri ve bu seyahatlerde ziyaretettiği şehirlerdeki izlenimleri ortaya koyarak İngiltere kentlerine ve kentleşme unsuruna kendine özgü bir bakış açısı getirmiştir. Yazarın İngiliz kentlerine bakış açısının ve bu bakış açısında ön plana çıkardığı şehre, kente dair algının irdelenmesi ve ortaya koyduğu izlenimlerin analizedilmesi önem arzetmektedir. Yazar ve onu seyahat etmeye iten motivasyonları irdelencektir. Kent algısı analizi için mekan kavramı açıklanacaktır. Gözlemler çerçevesinde şehir algısında ortaya konulan hususları analiz etmede edebi gazetecilik yaklaşımı vurgulanacaktır. Yazarın seyahat ettiği dönemde İngiliz kentlerinin durumları, yazarın bu kentlere bakış açısı ve ortaya koyduğu kendine has şehir algısı incelenecektir.

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Sonuçta, çalışmada, Priestley'in 20. Yüzyılbaşındakiİngiltere'ye, kentlere bakış açısı ve kent algısı hususunda ön plana çıkardığı olgular ortaya çıkarılacaktır.

AnahtarKelimeler: Priestley, İngiltere, Şehir, Seyahat, Edebiyat

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

People have traveled from one city to another due to certain reasons for centuries. They have observed many different places and come across many different events and occasions. Writing about these occasions, events and places, some of them have left informative works for the next generations. Presenting their journeys in a literary sense, many authors, who traveled within a literary perspective, embraced an informative and artful attitude in their works. One of the significant examples of these is John Priestley Boynton's *English Journey: Being A Rambling But Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During A Journey Through England During The Autumn of The Year* (1933). As the title suggests, being loyal to what he heard, saw and experienced but including his emotions, the author presented his journeys he did through England in 1933 not as a trip full of ordinary narration but as a work which reflects his feelings, ideas and what he saw and heard in the period of the journey. In this perspective, among the things that author saw and heard, city and urbanization take important place as they are for many countries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, the author presented a distinctive notion of city by his writings about the cities. From this point, the aim of the author about making these trips, the way he emphasizes his observations on the journeys of these cities, the notion he presents for the cities of early 20<sup>th</sup> century are significant for the study.

# 2. METHOD

#### 2.1. Background Information About John Boynton Priestley

John Boynton Priestley is not only a British author, playwright or man of letters but also a publisher and journalist. Even in his childhood "he read and wrote and even had articles printed in local papers, including a local Labour weekly" (Young, 1977: 9). After his childhood, in post war era of World War I when he was as a young British citizen, he kept writing for journals. His success on this field has not been limited to his childhood, but extended to his adulthood period including World War II when he worked as broadcaster on BBC.

In addition to his journalist identity, his literary identity also reflects another powerful characteristic of the author. In this perspective, his literary works such as *The Good Companions* (1929), *Angel Pavement* (1930) *Stamboul Train* (1932) are examples of his achievements in literary sense. However, his achievements were not only on novel but also on drama. J. C. Twin wrote that "If Bernard Shaw is headmaster, Priestley is one of the senior perfects" (Young, 1977: 11). In this context, like

author's journalist identity, his literary identity is full of success in many fields ranging from novel to theatre. The author who embraces socialist approach in many of his works of which are in different fields, presents *English Journey* (1933) in order to show poor conditions of England in 1930s because the author "describes the areas of bad unemployment and the contrast he fairly makes with the reasonably prosperous parts of the country" (Young, 1977: 11). In this context, when these characteristics of the author, who traveled many countries and gained experiences, are considered, it is for sure that the qualities of the author are significant about making sense of 1930s of England and its cities.

# 2.2. England In The Early 20th Century and Travel Literature

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to many authors travel literature was evolving into a new form or entering its last phase. In this context, Paul Fussell who devotes himself to modern travel literature states that "the interwar years were the final age of travel" (Korte, 2000: 128). While the years between World War I and World War II were interwar years for England, these years and postwar periods were the years that English travelers focused on the country for their journeys. Because "social conditions in Britain before and after the Second World War – above all the loss of identity as a world power and the associated economic problems – meant that travel on home territory gained new importance as an exploration of the condition anglaise" (Korte, 2000: 133). Therefore, many authors ranging from George Orwell to J. B. Priestley began to travel within the country in this period. Besides, this socio-economic situation of England took place in the travel writers' writings in a critical perspective.

Following the First World War and the experience of radical discontinuity which it entailed, the urge to escape from a civilization home whose values were increasingly called into question becomes a dominant theme in British travel writing (Korte, 2000: 138).

Therefore, the authors presented critical views in their works and manuscripts against the civilization and its values.

This period was also a time when the technology improved and therefore the travels accelerated and done by the means of new technological devices or vehicles. In this context, stating that "most methods of transport turns the whole would – be traveler into a human bullet on the effects of new means of travel for travel writer", Jonathan Raban emphasizes that journey is a very fast action form for everyone ranging from the travel writer to any traveler(Korte, 2000: 128). Thus, traditional touristic traveling approach loses its importance, reflecting the observed authenticity of the visited countries in the literary work and conveying truth extracted from the author's real life experiences become significant.

The tourists, because of their allegedly indiscriminate mode of travel, miss the authentic qualities of the countries they visit is but a true traveler confirms his or her own experience of authenticity" (Korte, 2000: 131)

As stated, in contrast to tourists, the true traveler considers the importance of authenticity. In this perspective, it could be said that "the perception of tourism as inauthentic travel also persists today, not least in the travelogue" (Korte, 2000: 131). Therefore, the travelogue doesn't consider an ordinary journey as a work but gives importance to authenticity in the travel writing.

## 2.3. Theories

#### 2.3.1. Space

In order to analyze the descriptions and approaches for cities, the explanation of the space as a term and theoryis significant. According to Foucault "space is a question of power" (Foucault, 1970: 15). Furthermore "works enable the criticism and the reordering of the geographical imaginations of the world" (Lury and Massey, 1999: 230). As Foucault suggests, reordering or compounding the narration of events gives power to the author to shape the space in the text. This is power of description, depiction and representation. The author, benefiting from this power describes and manipulates space however he wishes. In this perspective, in order to understand and make sense of a city which is important for the work, it is necessary to understand the space.

As Lefebrve argues "space is produced by social relations that it also reproduces, mediates, and transforms (Natter and Jones, 1997: 148). Space is not a passive entity but an active element. Likewise, the changes on the space, the entities on it also subject to the changes.

Space thus is constantly in flux and carries multiple meanings. It is not a given, a neutral stage upon which history is played out. It is part of history and culture, constantly being defined and redefined. In other words, space is a cultural process through which past erupts into the present (Gregory, 1997:228).

While describing the city, the author, who is aware of these variables, emphasizes not only the past but the changes that represent that day and the future. The author puts forth whatever exists in the space, all the social and cultural changes they experienced and continue to experience.

## 2.3.2. Literary Journalism

Literary journalism which dates back to very old times and becomes significant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an approach to be emphasized for the analysis of such literary works based on observation and research. Literary journalism covers manuscripts that have both qualities of literature and, characteristics of research and reporting which are typical to journalism. In this perspective, Tom Wolfe describes literary journalism as "reporting that read like fiction" (Connery, 1992: 3). Providing a more comprehensive description, James Murphy states that literary journalism is "an artistic, creative, literary reporting form with three basic traits, dramatic literary techniques; intensive reporting; and reporting of generally acknowledged subjectivity" (Connery, 1992: 15).

The emergence of this reporting and literature reflects itself in today's authors as it is seen in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) which came into existence by Mark Twain's sending his manuscripts, consisted of his observation on the journey he took to Holy Land from America, to an American journal. The four important characteristics of literary journalism shine out in today's such works. Among them, the first one is the construction of the space, scene by scene and skipping to other scenes by the descriptions. Therefore, by the means of literary journalism's reporting quality, it is witnessed to other lives and the events happened in those lives. Besides, the dialogues heard or expressed in these events are recorded so that the reader is involved into the event and he is led to empathize with the event, space and people. Furthermore, by the means of the dialogue, descending deep into the characters and spaces, more clear and lucid portrayals are revealed.

In addition to these two qualities, third characteristic of the literary journalism is third person point of view for the narration. By the means of this point of view, the reader feels like he is experiencing the events behind a certain character and observes the emotional reality of the scene. Journalists mostly prefer first person point of view in their writings, but as this point of view narrows down the reader into one, single person's point of view, it is not commonly preferred. If the reader is limited to one person's ideas and limits, he may not be able to understand other ideas and occasions. Therefore, in order to make the reader understand other ideas and occasions, Tom Wolfe suggests interview method emphasizing "interviewing him about his thoughts and emotions, along with everything else" (Wolfe, 1977: 47). This method is a significant method according to which interviews are made with the person or people within the space as a leading literary journalist Truman Capote does to constitute his work *In Cold Blood* (1966) by interviewing with the two murderers of America in 1960s. The last important characteristic of literary journalism is recording of elements or characteristics such as daily acts, gestures, attitudes, furniture style, clothing style which will reveal the statue and life styles of the people. Therefore, it will be possible to access to many socio-cultural elements related to these people and the spaces that these people live on, and analyze these elements.

# 3. DISCUSSION

English Journey which was written by J. B. Priestley as a result of experiences he had by the many trips he took, is a significant work reflecting the socio-economical conditions of England in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The full title of the work is English Journey: Being A Rambling But Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During A Journey Through England During The Autumn of The Year 1933. As title of the work suggests, stating that the work is a story based on author's observations and experiences, the author puts reality and story side by side, and emphasizing that the work is a travel literature example, he points out that the analysis of the work is possible by certain approaches as travel literature and literary journalism.

### 3.1. John Boynton Priestley And English Journey In The Scope Of Travel Literature

The author whose life is full of travels, visits to different countries and is loyal to the characteristics of the  $20^{th}$  century British travel literature, puts forth a work which is about many travels he attended and many cities he observed. Especially, the changing travel style by the improving technology reflects itself in the very first sentence of the work.

I will begin, I said, where a man might well first land, at Southampton. There was a motor coach going to Southampton- there seems to be a motor coach going anywhere in this island-and I caught it (Priestley, 134: 4).

At the very beginning of the work, the author states that he will use a technological transportation vehicle, which affects the formation of 20<sup>th</sup> century travel literature, and reach Southampton, one of the important cities of England, by such a vehicle. Furthermore, stating that there must a be coach going anywhere in this island, the author emphasizes cities are connected by buses and therefore points out the social change in the country. Furthermore, in contrast to old travel literature writers, he puts forth how different he is and a modern travel literature writer. In addition to that, being one of the pioneers of 20<sup>th</sup> century travel tradition within the country which is peculiar to this century, the author expresses that instead of abroad, he prefers the travels inside the country.

As a reflection of one of the characteristics of 20<sup>th</sup> century travel literature, the author approaches the cities with a critical view. The author states that "After the familiar muddle of West London, the Great West Road looked very odd. Being new, it did not look English. We might have suddenly rolled into California". (Priestley, 1934: 4). Therefore, author emphasizes the change in Southampton, refers to the change coming in the postwar period which is also criticized by other authors, explains that he doesn't fancy this change. Besides he claims that the typical to England is lost, the new roads in Southampton are far away from the characteristics and traditionality of the country, and the country makes people feel like they are in America. "Priestley came to believe that preserving a traditional, rural England and its values would be an important revitalizing force for Britain's future development" (Korte, 2000: 134). The author feels uncomfortable with this socio-cultural change, and criticizes England, which lost its power by the World War I, about getting worse by staying away from traditionality.

In this portrayal done about the space, as in harmony with space theory, the author points out the socio-economical change on the space, and within this space, which was formed and shaped according to the writing, narration power of the author, a negative city representation is presented due to author's critical approach to innovation in the city. Furthermore, due to the quality of  $20^{th}$  century travel literature and the characteristic of the author who has the idea that the traveler needs to observe authentic and traditional characteristics related to that city or country, Priestley searches for authentic elements in the country and expresses his negative views on this unreal and inauthentic looking street or space he comes across in Southampton which chances rapidly by the  $20^{th}$  century. In this perspective, the author has a

keen desire for reflecting reality as it can be inferred from the title of the work which suggests that the work in which these trips are told is a real story and aims to portray reality, authenticity of these journeys.

#### 3.2. Literary Journalism and Notion Of The City In English Journey

The characteristic that makes the work a literary journalism example is reporting technique which is one of the main elements of literary journalism and is exemplified in the work. The author presents information and details about the cities as if presenting a report about these locations.

When you get to the end of New Street, you can cross into Paradise Street and then arrive in Easy Row. There you find the white Hall of Memory, built to commemorate the 14.000 Birmingham men who were killed in the Great War. Behind this Hall of Memory is Baskerville Place, called after the painter, John Baskerville (Priestley, 1934: 84).

With a formal tone, the author who is like a reporter and reports an event, tells about the soldiers lost their lives in the World War I and the monument erected in memory of them. After this description, with the same style but not adding any emotion and thought and within an objective point of view, he presents the Baskerville monument which is in the very same location and put up in memory of painter John Baskerville. Therefore, the reader obtains both historical and scientific information about the city and past.

Another characteristic of the literary journalism is scene by scene construction of the space. In this perspective, in the first pages of the work the author provides a detailed portrayal of Southampton city and by the detailed description he takes the reader into a trip which is like from one street to another street of the city.

The place I rolled into down the London road was quite different, a real town. This is a fine approach, very gradual and artful in its progression from county to town. You are still staring at the pleasant Hampshire countryside when you notice that its beginning to put itself into some order, and then the next minute you find that it is Southampton Common and that the townsfolk can be seen walking there; and, the minute after, the road is cutting between West Park and East Park, and on either side the smaller children of absent pursers and chief stewards are running from sunlight to shadow, and there are pretty frocks, glimmering among the trees; and now, in another minute, the city itself is all round you, offering you hats and hams and acrobats at the Palace theatre. It would be impossible to say where Southampton itself really began, though I should like to believe that the true boundary is that corner of East Park where there is a memorial to the lost engineers of the Titanic, to prove that there are dangerous trades here too. Further down, the London road changes into Above Bar Street; then the traffic swirls about the Bar Gate itself, which is very old but has so many newly —painted armorial decorations that

it looks as gaudy as the proscenium of a toy theatre; and then once through or round Bar Gate, you are in high Street. Another quarter of a mile or so, at the bottom of High Street, you must go carefully; otherwise you may lose England altogether and find yourself looking at the Woolworth building or table mountain (Priestley, 1934: 12).

The author provides scene by scene construction of the city, which is an important aspect of literary journalism. Describing from one corner to another and emphasizing where it begins and reaches, the author provides a detailed portrait of the city. Besides, as the entity of the space, the people in the city are described. As literary journalism targets, by this scene by scene construction the people such as pursers or chief stewards living in mentioned scenes, spaces of the city are represented and information about their lifestyles are provided. Moreover, by the depiction of the space, the connection between the Titanic ship, which sank due to an accident in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean in 1912 and city's history, it is put forth that the engineers who sacrificed their lives in the construction and the accident of the ship are not forgotten in the city, and the idea that ship, accident and people coalesced with the space by the means of the mentioned monument.

In order to travel into inner thoughts of the people in the city, and to detail the city descriptions; integration of the dialogues of the city people, to which literary journalism attaches importance, into the text is significant. In this context, it is common to come up with such dialogues in the work.

Are you going to Southampton?

So am I. Just to look round. I've heard of one or two possibilities there. Should be a good opening in Southampton. What do you think of electric light fittings?

I told him that I knew nothing about them.

Friend of mine swears by them. All this electricity they are putting in, d'you see? Villages, all over, they are getting electric light. And they've got to have fittings, haven't they? Good profit on them too, they tell me. I'm going to look into that. Run wireless too as a side – line.

Do you understand wireless sets?

Oh yes. I was in the wireless trade one time, about six years ago in Birmingham. But mind you, wireless then and wireless now – oh! And he gave a short laugh – different thing altogether (Priestley, 1934: 7).

The author talks to a tradesman next to him about city and the improving technology when he travels to Southampton. By the means of the dialogue, the reader learns that, the electric usage and its settlement in 1930s England, especially in the cities are becoming common. Besides, by the means of the dialogue, the reader feels that very moment and learns this new information with the author, and by involving into the event, the reader is led to have empathy with the change the urbanization brings. Furthermore, as the

inner thoughts of the characters are revealed by the dialogues, human portrait that runs after the money and benefit from the changes and improvements in the city is presented by describing one of the tradesmen in the city.

In the perspective of human and space representation, as a characteristic of literary journalism, the preference of third person point of view for the objectivity is reflected in the work.

The Bournville Estate was founded by the late George Cadbury in 1895. In 1879, he and his brother Richard, who were partners in business as Cocoa and Chocolate manufacturers, moved their works from the centre of industrial Birmingham to what was then an entirely rural area four miles from the city. The removal gave George Cadbury an opportunity to put into practice ideas he had long in mind, the result of his contact with working men as a teacher in Early Morning Adult School, with which he was connected for over fifty years. He had been led to conclusion that the root of most social evils lay in the bad housing conditions in which all to many had to live. He was himself fond of country life in crowded industrial areas, and when the factory was thoroughly established in its new environment he began to see ways and means of giving more and more people the opportunity to enjoy. He did not, however, contemplate a scheme only for the benefit of his own workpeople; rather, his idea was to make what he called a small contribution to the solution of a great problem – the problem of housing as affecting large industrial towns (Priestley, 1934: 90).

In contrast to first point of view narration used mainly in the journalism, the author provides an extended and more informative perspective to the reader by the means of the third person point of view narration in the work. Therefore, he presents objective information about the migration from urban to rural and informs the reader about the results of the industrialism. Moreover, after two years of the publication of the work, in 1935, about this industrialization, escape to rural, occupation and conquest of rural by many houses, the author complains that "a wonderful heritage of beauty, wefeel, is being recklessly squandered" (Burden, 2006: 194). Besides, the author tells how the foundation of the rural life existing in modern England today was laid and why people escaped from the city centers. However, the author doesn't limit himself to third person point of view, and presents his narration by the first person point of view as well.

I could not do that, but I did the next best thing: I entered the Corporation Art Gallery and Museum, of which I had heard a good deal. The Director of the Gallery assured me that Birmingham had always had the craftsmen too and proved it by showing me a case after case of local silverware, some of it of tasteless design but all of it admirably executed. He also showed me some drawings done by young students- one of them only a boyfriend at the local school of art; and these were surprisingly good. He assured me too that Birmingham could be a very generous toward its Gallery and Museum (Priestley, 1934: 81).

In this section presented within first person point of view, the author performs the interview process, which is one of the main elements of the literary journalism, and reveals the thought and emotions of the person he interviews. In this perspective, the author presents people who care much about art, the vastness of these people and the society's approach to the art in Birmingham by the first point of view narration and interview method.

In addition to all these, as the last and a significant characteristic of literary journalism, in order to present the life styles of the societies by the reflection of the elements such as gesture, clothing style or furniture, the text gives examples from city and city people.

Here are two glimpses of Birmingham life. The first is of the public whist drive I attended on Saturday night. It is worth remembering that card games, like almost everything else in this land of social hierarchies, are not without their mass distinctions. Whist was once the favorite card game of the upper class. Now that those people play bridge, auction, or contract, whist has found its devotees in a very different set of people, chiefly the small shop-keeping, artisan, and working classes. Why don't these people too play bridge, which is, after all, a much better game? We can only guess. Some of them think bridge much too complicated for them. On the other hand, many of them play a good time game of solo whist, which demands considerable initiative and skill. Probably a second and a weightier reason is that many of these people do not play bridge because they shrink from imitating the wealthier classes and do not want their friends and neighbours to think the yare suddenly trying to be posh (Priestley, 1934: 101).

The author points out that a card game which looks very simple signifies class distinction in the Birmingham society and the games that people play by cards determine their classes, statues in the city. Therefore, presenting the statues of the people by the means of the lifestyles of the people, the author provides a report about the city and its people. Furthermore, he presents information to the reader about the socio-economic conditions of the people living in this space.

Therefore, the work containing the qualities of literary journalism, also as a "travel journal" depicts the observations of the writer on the cities he visits (Cook, 1997: 127). According to these descriptions, "in Briston he wanders round the docks and quays, musing on the city's greatpast" and tells that "once in the city, he could not see the Cathedral: but saw the Labour Exchange in Salisbury" and by such narrations it is stated that the author refers to land marks of the cities and tells his observations to the reader about the city (Cook, 1997: 128). This journey is a long one in which he visits many cities. In this perspective, about these journeys Vincent Brome says that" it was in the autumn of 1933 that Priestley set out on a pilgrimage through England from Southampton to London by way of the Midlands, Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Thyne and Tees and East Anglia" (Brome, 1988: 1950). The description of all these cities relies on the notes he takes during his journeys and therefore he puts forth this work which could be considered as a literary journalism example. In this perspective, as the journalists do "traveling frequently by coach, he made endless notes, writing rough chapters sometimes en route" (Brome, 1988: 151). The

authorlike Truman Capote, takes notes during his journeys, transforms these notes into draft chapters and finally forms his work.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Finally, John Boynton Priestley who set on a long journey in 1933, visited many cities of England, interviewed many people. In his work in which he depicts early 20th century England, he describes the cities he saw and presented information to the reader about the life conditions, people and spaces of the period. The author, who reflects many different perspectives in his work by means of his qualities as authorship, journalism, man of letters, both integrated characteristics of travel literature into the work and exemplified the characteristics of literary journalism, which comes to the fore again in the 20th century. In this perspective, during the journeys he did within the tradition of 20th century travel literature, he embraces a critical approach and gaze towards the changes in the cities he observed. Moreover, in accordance with the literary journalism, like presenting a report to the reader about the city, he provided objective and informative knowledge. In addition to these, in the context of the four important aspects of literary criticism; by the means of scene by scene descriptions of the author, the readers feel like touring in the city, the dialogues among city people attach the readers into the daily lifes of those people, and lead them comprehend the period, people and spaces.

In addition to these, the third aspect of literary journalism, preference of third person point of view in the narration, is reflected in the work, and in the city descriptions done by the third person point of view which is an objective and wider perspective, a wider perspective and information are provided to the reader. Besides, the author not only reflects the third person point of view but interviews of the people in the city and narrates these interviews in first person point of view. Therefore, the emotions, thoughts and social lives in cities of England make sense for the reader. In addition to all these, and as the last important aspect of the literary journalism, the author puts forth material entities, gestures and acts of people which will reveal their social statues and lives. In this perspective, exemplifying certain materialistic values and entities which are important in city life, the author depicts the life in the city. Therefore, the author depicts and brings up to the reader many events and changes in the cities he mentioned and visited, and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially 1930s England, the past with the descriptions he provides.

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