

**PSYCHOLOGICAL/PSYCHIATRIC APPROACHES
TO THE ISSUE OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR
SUPERNATURAL/PRETERNATURAL
NOVELS CONFLICTING WITH REALITY¹**

**Gerçekle Çatışan Doğaüstü/Olağanüstü Romanların Arz Talep
Konusuna Psikolojik/Psikiyatrik Yaklaşımlar**

Nuran ÖZLÜK²

Abstract

From the very beginning of his existence, human being has been fed with supernatural/preternatural narratives such as tales, myths, legends, epics and has handed them down to the novels as a narrative tool of our times due to the various social, political, economic, religious changes/transitions experienced over the course of time. The reasons behind the desire to turn to imaginary by running away/escaping from reality is one of the main issues that psychology/psychiatry should address. Because human being is a part of his own time/society. His tendencies, choices serve as mirror that reveals many positive or negative characteristics of the era. In this study, psychological/psychiatric reasons at the core of the writing and reading of these highly appealing supernatural/preternatural novels are introduced with an interdisciplinary approach.

Key words: *Supernatural/preternatural novels, psychopathology, psychology, psychiatry.*

Özet

İnsanoğlu var olduğu günden bu yana masal, mit, efsane, destan gibi doğaüstü/olağanüstü anlatılarla beslenmiş, zaman içinde geçirilen çeşitli sosyal, siyasi, ekonomik, dini, felsefi değişimler/dönüşümler sebebiyle bunu modern zamanların anlatı aracı olan doğaüstü/olağanüstü unsurlar içeren fantastik, bilimkurgu, ütopyik, antiütopyik gibi romanlara aktarmıştır. Gerçek/gerçekçilikten uzaklaşarak/kaçarak hayali olana sığınma isteğinin altında yatan sebepler psikoloji/psikiyatrinin ilgilenmesi gereken konulardan biridir. Nitekim hem Doğu hem de Batı'da çoğunlukla psikopatolojik bir durum olarak görülen bu konu ile ilgili çeşitli çalışmalar, araştırmalar yapılmıştır. Çünkü insan yaşadığı dönemin/toplumun bir parçasıdır. Onun eğilimleri, tercihleri aynı zamanda devrinin olumlu veya olumsuz pek çok özelliğini ortaya koyan bir vesika niteliğindedir. Bu çalışmada oldukça ilgi gören doğaüstü/olağanüstü romanların yazılma ve okunma sebeplerinin merkezindeki psikolojik/psikiyatrik nedenler disiplinler arası yaklaşımla ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Doğaüstü/olağanüstü roman, psikopatoloji, psikoloji, psikiyatri.*

¹ This work is an extended version of chapter from the PhD thesis.

² Assoc. Dr., Abant İzzet Baysal University, e-mail: nuranozluk@yahoo.com

Introduction

For many centuries, virtually non-existing supernatural/preternatural contents which have been arising from imagination created in oral and written way have been included in myths, legends, epics, tales, folktales, fairy tales most of which have made contribution to the reinforcement of imagination in both Eastern and Western cultures and have been basically considered as product of narrative customs. These contents have canalized man's dream world from Knight and Pastoral Novels, which are the products of Romanesque period forming the basis for the origin of the novel, the essential element of the written literature, to a different genre. Supernatural/preternatural works remain to be appealing to curious readers through fantastic, science fiction, gothic, utopian, anti-utopian novels, and so forth by opening a door to a new world of non-existing places, folks, languages, cultures; by astonishing, leaving doubts, disturbing, confusing and even entertaining; by offering scientific/technologic explanations within some people's field of interest, exciting some feelings like horror, terror, intense thrill; by depicting the ideal, problem-free state/society structure or by doing just the opposite of the last.

However, a novel in question has succumbed to the realistic art understanding in almost all places and have been handled in a popular sense rather than a literary one. From time to time, it has been viewed as harmful, sometimes underestimated and ridiculed, shortly these kind of novels have not been able to reach the level of compliment.

Conflict between Real and Supernatural/Preternatural

Reality/Realism and how to reflect this is the main issue of many fields of art. Starting from Plato and Aristotle, the concept of reality has been examined and handed on within the framework of mimesis. Reality has been accepted as the consistency of components addressed in novels such as incidents, individuals, time and space with reason and logic. And with a great influence of incidents such as Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, World Wars changing the life of societies to a great extent/dramatically and philosophical approaches like determinism, thoughts/mindsets based on religion, this phenomenon has been encountered in many different names and approaches such as bourgeois critical realism (Lukacs), Zola realism (positivistic and experimental realism), Kafka realism (a shore realism), social realism, (Kefeli 2012: 13) ontological realism, epistemological realism.

In almost all cultures, the importance of a novel's reflecting reality and/or whether there is a pragmatist expectation from these pieces is one of the themes which is prioritized. For instance, according to famous 19th-century novelist Gustave Flaubert, the aim of the realist writer is to express the reality to the extent the art permits. While learning lessons from works is the problem of the reader not of the writer, according to Turkish novelist of the same century, Namık Kemal, novels should conform to the mind and nature and should both entertain and educate.

Writing and reading literary pieces with supernatural/preternatural components have been disapproved not only for adults but for the children from the same standpoint. At the Children and Youth Literature Commission of the First Turkish Publications Congress in 1939, the harms of tales has been discussed due to the fact that they include preternatural elements (1997: 88).

The case is not different in World Literature for this genre of works written so far. Because of many reasons that it distorts perception of reality, it is found obscene, it comprises political critics and so forth, many supernatural/preternatural narratives have been banned. For instance, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) by Lewis Carroll was banned in 1931 in Hunan- a province in China- based on the reason that the attribution of human features to the characters might make the children regard human beings and animals equal. Mary Shelley's famous literary work Frankenstein (1818), was banned, since it was found obscene/inappropriate in South Africa in 1955. J.R.R. Tolkien's literary work named *Hobbit* (1937) was kept in adults section of the city Library in America in 1964 because it was deemed to be unsuitable for children (Le Guin 2006: 24). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) was banned on the grounds that it criticizes Soviet regime in the USSR. Harry Potter series, which is on the list of the books most widely read, was banned in more than sixty schools in Australia on account of tempting children to become wizard.

Psychological/Psychiatric Approaches to the Supernatural/Preternatural Novels

Within the framework of traditional realism, number of methods has been tried to convey subjects like objective external realism, individual internal realism etc. to the pages of a novel, yet in any case a special attention has been paid not to outrun mainstream assumptions. However, as time goes by, by coercing perception of human beings, scientific and technological developments, great wars experienced to date have led to the fragmentation of reality and made it open-ended and have set a ground for the emergence of a generation reminiscing their childhoods, retreating into a world of their own . Moreover, through these kind of novels, people express unaccepted, banned, contrarily seen and condemned thought, posture, behavior, tendency, attitude, which remain out of written and/or unwritten rules in society, and express or find themselves in them and they desire to blow off responsibilities. These can be counted as some of the main motives behind the propensity toward the preternatural novels. These issues, namely deviation from social, statistical norms and so forth, tendency toward abnormal and discordant feelings/thoughts/behaviors are in the interest of psychopathology.

These causes have also been voiced by writers/theoreticians from different cultures who write these genres of works in world literature. For instance, Rosemary Jackson states that these works do not abide by certain patterns and rules, they reflect the desire to escape to a better world than the real one and claims that mankind express his feelings and opinions through this types of novels (Jackson 1981: 2-4).

German Sociologist Leo Lowenthal argues that an extra insight can be gained into faltering in a sweet dream of a happy life by combining archaic and childish elements with the ideological and emotional component of traditional and respectful fiction in modern societies (Lowenthal 2006: 98).

Eric Rabkin, in his literary work named *The Fantastic in Literature*, says that fantastic is an element that confronted in many genres and this element offers a kind of consolation by rescuing us from responsibilities (Rabkin 1976: 188).

Tolkien' book *On Fairy-Stories* (Tolkien 1999, p. 84), Ursula K. Le Guin in her article entitled *Women Dreams and Dragons* (Le Guin 2006: 131), share the same opinion regarding that preternatural narratives are ways to escape.

While Mine Söğüt says: "In order to open a door for ourselves from harsh realities of our time, we try to narrate it by ornamenting with stories, fantasies and dreams, starting from surrealism" (Söğüt 2004: 32), Hakan Bıçakçı remarks: "Either we are somehow aware of the fact that in the postmodern era we live in, in an era all ideologies collapsed and all hopes faded individual is no longer the subject of life and has turned into the object of life or we have tendency to deviate from reality to alleys since we breathe this atmosphere unconsciously" (Söğüt 2004: 32). And this way they clarify the motives behind the divergence from reality.

Some authors are of one mind about the matter that the supernatural/preternatural narratives are not only means for people to escape, relax and consolate themselves, but also a scope for people to put their feelings and thoughts into words that otherwise they cannot express or dare to oppose freely due to the social/communal norms and they are a platform to make a difference. Thus, Rosmary Jackson associates the idea of escape from the real world to more beautiful one with the ideology and asserts that preternatural narratives represents the subversion of patriarchal and presupposed traditional classes and systems. By interpreting Todorov's system through Marxist feminist version, Jackson claimed that, from Frankenstein to Dracula, these narratives have reinforced commonplace ideology in many respect. Besides, according to Jackson, in many famous pieces there are misogynist traits and class differences (Jackson 1981: 3-4,122).

For Peter Penzoldt in *The Supernatural in Fiction*, preternatural narratives are pretexts used by many writers to describe the things that they cannot even dare to tell with a realistic tone (Penzoldt 1952: 146).

Todorov points out that things censored like necrophilia, incest relationship, homosexuality, and extreme lust are handled and he talks about another censorship, censorship of authors psychology. "The penalization of certain acts by society provokes a penalization invoked in and by the individual himself, forbidding him to approach certain taboo themes. More than a simple pretext, the fantastic is a means of combat against this kind of censorship as well as the other: sexual excesses will be more readily accepted by any censor if they are attributed to the devil" (Todorov 2004: 153-154).

Kathryn Hume, in her study titled *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, speaks of the imitation of reality and mimesis and defines fantasy as the desire to change the givens arising from boredom, play, longing for something lacking (Hume 1984: xii).

The reasons behind why supernatural/ preternatural novels are written and read are the themes that psychoanalytic deal with.

Sigmund Freud, who was the founder of Psychoanalytic, says that the sense of uncanny "unheimliche", which has a close relationship between preternatural according to him, refers to the individual introversion shaping human subconscious (Steinmetz 2006: 22-24).

As for Carl Gustav Jung, who is the pioneer of collective (racial) subconscious theory, he says: "To think otherwise than our contemporaries think is somehow illegitimate and disturbing; it is even indecent, morbid or blasphemous, and therefore socially dangerous for the individual. He is stupidly swimming against the social current." For the preternatural creatures like monsters, dragons Jung make a description as follows: "These, belong to all human race. Their existence is peculiar neither to a folk, society nor

a human race. Here, we come across a psychic stratum consisting of similar images embodied with myths for many centuries. This is a stratum common to all mankind. Because of this reason I call it 'collective unconscious. Collective unconscious is not outcome of personal acquisitions, it is inherited at birth. Our psychological structure also bears traces of millions of years of evolution just as our physical does" (Jung 2004: 21, 221).

Related to the Jung's theory, according to Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory, there is a one common pattern in all cultures' myths: "All myths and epics are linked in the human psyche, and that they are cultural manifestations of the universal need to explain social, cosmological and spiritual realities" (Campbell 2010: ii).

Jackson also resorts to the subconscious to account for preternatural narratives. Because these kind of narratives expose unconscious impulses; unconscious revolt against the rules of society (Jackson 1981: 44).

Edmund Jaloux argues that ghosts and ghouls narratives are not penned just to scare the readers, above all, issues related to spirit and material presents in them (Jaloux 1963: 602).

Artist is deemed to reflect his/her dilemmas, mental depression, mental illnesses and so forth and his/her work and psychology are interrelated to one another. For instance, Freud did this between E.T. Hoffman and his work *The Sand Man* attributing it to Hoffman's unhappy family and father who left them when Hoffman was three years old.

Another example comes from Nafissa Schasch, who correlates between Maupassant's stories and psychopathology. "By signifying that writer's most convenient fantastic narrative was seen in psychologically turbulent times of him and including Maupassant's family history, Schasch emphasizes the susceptibility to the illness genetically. The researcher analyzes the traces of some circumstances on his works such as pains from which the author suffer a lot, sedatives he was taking, mental and physical reactions he experienced, mental trauma resulting from genetic syphilis. In fact, fantastic stories of Maupassant are full of unbalanced, obsessive and delusional characters. The diaries these characters keep or confession they make to the doctors in mental hospitals are dreadful and the relation between fantastic and pathologic cases have been studied comprehensively" (Öztoğat 2006: 42-43).

There were some oppositions to the Freud's psychoanalytical interpretation of a literary work as it transform the work into a simple symptom and the writer into a real examination object (Todorov 2004: 147).

Besides, parapsychology examining telekinesis, telepathy, empathy, clairvoyance is also used in preternatural narratives.

Nossrat Prssechkian, who was the founder of positive psychotherapy based on the intercultural approach using supernatural/preternatural works in a psychotherapeutic sense, looks at these narratives so as to determine a patient's own conflicts and desires, resistance points.

"Aside from their values as *l'art pour l'art*, such genres as stories, fairy tales, myths, fables, parables, artistic productions, poetry, jokes, and so forth are tools of folk therapy and folk pedagogy, tool with which people help themselves long before the development of

psychotherapy. All of the leads me to the question: Can't these also be used intentionally and consciously in the therapeutic treatment of conflicts and in self-help – all without being dismissed as childish rubbish or nostalgic curiosities, having nothing more than sentimental value? In my medical practice, in seminars, and in lectures, I found again and again that it is primarily parables, and Eastern stories that speak to the listener or patient.

Data acquired from the studies on brain, shows that two hemisphere of the brain process the information with two separate systems. Left hemisphere is responsible for logical, analytic thinking and verbal part of communication. As for the right hemisphere, which is relatively less dominant, it is composed of holistic thoughts and comprehension, metaphorical approach, feelings and less-censored connections. Based on this hypothesis, application of story and mythos to psychotherapy has a novel value: differences desired to make in a person's existing attitudes can be only realized with release of intuition and fantasy. Since reason and logic cannot overcome them, this way gains importance therapeutically. Individual reaches fantasy and learns to think within verbal image of story." (Prssechian 1997: iii, 21).

Conclusion

Starting from modernism and based on psychological/psychiatric evolution, escaping, taking refuge in a dream world, shaking off the feeling of condemnation and inso doing striving for peace of mind and happiness have given rise to an increase in writing and reading of the postmodernist novels shaped with time and space. This two-sided impact, namely supply-demand issue, formed with social, political, religious, economic etc conditions and fed by psychological needs has become an incentive for a novelist to write up and an outcome of the reader's demand.

Besides, such social reasons as proliferation of publishers pressing such works, filming of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings Series* and Rowling's *Harry Potter Series*, broadcasting these genre as TV series, common usage of web sites in which information and documents are shared and online games are played by the fans of this sort, mobile games, and so forth are also the other aspect of the demand for these works. And through animation techniques, digital montages, effects, sound mixing etc., animating with visual and auditory sense also serves to the same objective with the causes behind writing and reading of supernatural/preternatural novels.

References

- Campbell, Joseph (2010). *Kahramanın sonsuz yolculuğu*. Translator: Sabri Gürses. İstanbul: Kabalıcı Press.
- Hume, Kathryn (1984). *Fantasy and mimesis: Responses to reality in western literature*. New York: Methuen.
- Jackson, Rosemary (1981). *Fantasy: The literature of subversion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jaloux, Edmond (1963). "Alman romantiklerinde fantastik olanın yeri". *Turkish Literature* 142: 602.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (2004). *İnsan ruhuna yönelik*. Translator: Engin Büyükin. İstanbul: Say Press.

- Kefeli, Emel (2012). *Batı edebiyatında akımlar*. İstanbul: Dergâh Press.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. (2006). "Amerikalılar ejderhalardan neden korkar?". *Kadınlar rüyalar ejderhalar*. Edited: Deniz Erksan, Bülent Somay, Müge Gürsoy Sökmen. İstanbul: Metis Press.
- Lowenthal, Leo (2006). "Edebiyat sosyolojisi". *Edebiyat sosyolojisi üzerine*. Translator: Salih Özer. Edited: Köksal Alver. Ankara: Hece Press.
- Öztoğat, Nedret (2006). "Fantastiği tanımlamak: Bir tema üzerine çeşitlemeler". *Yazında ve Çeviride Fantastik*. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Press.
- Penzoldt, Peter (1952). *The supernatural in fiction*. London: Peter Nevill.
- Prssechkian, Nossrat (1997). *Doğu hikâyeleriyle psikoterapi (Oriental Stories as Tools in Psychotherapy)*. Translator: Hürol Fışıloğlu. İstanbul: Sistem Press.
- Rabkin, S. Rabkin (1976). *The fantastic in literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Söğüt, Mine (2004). "Sıradan Hayatlar, Fantastik Zamanlar". *Picus* 14: 32. <http://www.ozgurpencere.com/tr>. [Retrieved from 10 December 2007]
- Steinmetz, Jean-Luc (2006). *Fantastik edebiyat*. Translator: Hasan Fehmi Nemli. Ankara: Dost Press.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (2004). *Fantastik: edebî türe yapısal bir yaklaşım*. Translator: Nedret Öztokat. İstanbul: Metis Press.
- Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel (1999). *Peri masalları üzerine*. Translator: Serap Erincan. İstanbul: Altıkırkbeş Press.
- (1997). *1939 Birinci Türk Neşriyatı Kongresi*. Ankara: Edebiyatçılar Derneği Press.