



An Analysis of University Students' Narratives in the Context of Creativity and Analytical Psychology: Fantastic Literature

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Anlatılarının Yaratıcılık ve Analitik Psikoloji Bağlamında Analizi: Fantastik Yazın

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Abstract:

Fantasy literature is a genre that blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, offering readers aesthetic and psychological experiences. Such texts engage the imagination, develop symbolic thinking, and foster the creation of original, creative narratives through language. Therefore, fantasy literature can be seen as an ideal context for identifying elements of creative writing, particularly in analyzing students' narratives. In this context, the present study comprehensively analyzes twenty fantasy stories written by participants in terms of creative writing elements. During the analysis, the use of setting, originality, symbolic elements, and archetypal structures was the main criterion. The participants' written narratives were evaluated using content analysis, and the data were systematically examined using MAXQDA 2024. A multidimensional approach was adopted, considering creative writing components alongside archetypes from analytical psychology. The findings reveal that the participants utilized settings in both everyday and fantastical dimensions to reflect the atmosphere and the characters' inner journeys. Traditional fairy-tale and mythological elements were reinterpreted in modern, original ways; through the use of symbols, psychological themes such as personal transformation, courage, fear, and wisdom were concretized. While the hero and wise old figure archetypes were central to the narratives, the shadow, anima/animus, persona, and helper figures functioned as secondary elements that supported the journey and psychological integration. The study demonstrates that fantasy stories can be an effective tool in educational contexts for fostering participants' creative thinking, symbolic literacy, and emotional and psychological awareness.

Keywords: Fantasy story, Creative writing, Jung, Symbols, Archetype, Content analysis.

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Öz:

Fantastik yazın, gerçeklik ile hayal dünyası arasındaki sınırları esneterek okuyucuda hem estetik hem de psikolojik deneyimler yaratma imkânı sunan bir edebî tür olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu tür metinler, bireylerin hayal gücünü kullanarak sembolik düşünme yetilerini geliştirmelerine ve dil aracılığıyla özgün, yaratıcı anlatılar inşa etmelerine imkân tanır. Bu nedenle yaratıcı yazma öğelerinin tespitinde fantastik yazın, özellikle öğrencilerin yazılı anlatılarının incelenmesinde ideal bir alan olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bu bağlamda, gerçekleştirilen çalışmada katılımcılar tarafından kaleme alınan yirmi fantastik hikâye, yaratıcı yazma öğeleri açısından kapsamlı bir biçimde analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sürecinde, hikâyelerde mekân kullanımı, özgünlük, sembolik öğeler ve arketipsel yapılar temel kriterler olarak ele alınmıştır. Katılımcıların yazılı anlatıları içerik analizi yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş ve veriler MAXQDA 2024 yazılımı kullanılarak sistematik biçimde çözümlenmiştir. Analiz sürecinde yaratıcı yazma öğeleri ile analitik psikoloji temelinde arketipler dikkate alınarak çok boyutlu bir yaklaşım benimsenilmiştir. Bulgular, katılımcıların hikâyelerinde mekânları hem gündelik hem de fantastik boyutlarda kullanarak atmosfer ve karakterlerin içsel yolculuklarını yansıttıklarını göstermektedir. Hikâyelerde geleneksel masal ve mitolojik öğeler modern ve özgün bir biçimde yeniden yorumlanmış; semboller aracılığıyla bireysel dönüşüm, cesaret, korku ve bilgelik gibi psikolojik temalar somutlaştırılmıştır. Kahraman ve bilge arketipleri hikâyelerin merkezinde yer alırken, gölge, anima/animus, persona ve yardımcı figürler yolculuğu ve psikolojik bütünlüğü destekleyen ikincil öğeler olarak işlev görmüştür. Araştırma, fantastik hikâyelerin eğitimsel bağlamda katılımcıların yaratıcı düşünme, sembolik okuma ve duygusal-psikolojik farkındalık geliştirme süreçlerinde etkili bir araç olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fantastik hikâye, Yaratıcı yazma, Jung, Semboller, Arketip, İçerik analizi.

Introduction

Fantastic literature, as one of the most original genres of literature, draws attention with its structure that blurs the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. As defined by Todorov, this genre is a space where the perception of reality is suspended, leaving the reader not only in uncertainty between the supernatural and the natural but also, as emphasized by Jackson, breaking the individual's rational perception and offering an opportunity to connect with the unconscious (Todorov, 2004; Jackson, 1981).

Fantastic stories also create a space for individuals to question their fears, desires, and thoughts about social norms. Thus, through works in this genre, readers can ask and reconstruct their own identities. Therefore, fantasy literature is considered not only an aesthetic experience but also a multi-layered literary form in which the individual interacts with identity construction and unconscious processes (Çetindaş, 2021).

The function of fantasy writing not only remains limited to personal imagination but also emerges as a carrier of social values, cultural images, and collective memory. In this context, Musuloğlu and Sezgin state that fantasy literature reconstructs archetypes in children's and young adult literature, facilitating individuals' connection with societal values (Musuloğlu and Sezgin, 2023). Additionally, Akçeşme and Özdemir Ağlar approach fantasy literature not only as a fictional narrative genre but also as an ecopsychological and symbolic field of analysis that reveals the relationship individuals establish with their environment (Akçeşme and Özdemir Ağlar, 2023). In this regard, the fantasy texts produced by university students offer a valuable area for examination, as they express both individual creativity and social and cultural contexts on a symbolic level (Onur and Zorlu, 2017; Demir, 2019).

Creativity is closely intertwined with fantasy literature, a fundamental component of the genre. Guilford conceptualized creativity in terms of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration, and evaluated it as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond

cognitive processes (Guilford, 1967). Current studies show that imagination and creativity enhance individuals' imaginative expression forms and enable the production of alternative narratives (Ünveren, 2020). In this context, fantasy literature is seen as a genre that enhances students' originality, nurtures imaginative modes of expression, and broadens creative possibilities (Ertekin, 2007). Therefore, creative writing and imaginative expression play a central role in understanding both the individual and pedagogical functions of fantasy literature.

At this point, Jung's analytical psychology makes significant contributions to the theoretical framework. Jung defined the collective unconscious as a repository of universal human symbols and argued that fairy tales, myths, and fantastical narratives reveal this unconscious (Jung, 1964). Franz also stated that fantastical narratives make archetypes visible and reflect the individual's spiritual development symbolically (Franz, 1996). Gürses emphasized the intercultural continuity of the hero archetype and demonstrated the applicability of archetype theory to literary texts (Gürses, 2007). In this context, the frequent appearance of figures such as the hero, shadow, anima/animus, and wise old man in the fantastical writings of university students is not coincidental (Gülcan, 2020; Kavut, 2020).

Fantasy literature appears as a multidimensional field that can be examined within the frameworks of both creativity theories and analytical psychology, with a focus on the individual and society. Therefore, in this study, the narratives of university students were evaluated in light of the creative elements and archetypal analyses offered by analytical psychology, yielding meaningful data on individual imagination, unconscious processes, and the construction of social identity.

In the study, the creative writing elements in the participants' writings—namely, space, originality, and symbols—were examined in detail. Spaces not only strengthen the narratives' contexts but also reflect the characters' inner journeys and deepen their conflicts

(Bachelard, 1994). The spaces in participants' stories reflect their inner worlds and creative processes. Originality, at the core of creative writing, allows writers to showcase their individual voices and experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994).

The main aim of the research is to examine university students' produced fantasy narratives in the context of creativity and analytical psychology. In this regard, the study seeks to answer the following question: To what extent, and in what ways, are creative writing elements (such as space, originality, symbols, etc.) included in students' written narratives? To what extent are archetypes, which are fundamental concepts of analytical psychology, observed in these narratives, and how are these elements expressed?

Method

Research Design

In this study, document analysis, a qualitative research design, was used. Document analysis enables the systematic examination of data related to research problems using written materials (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

Working Group

The study's sample consisted of 20 undergraduate students studying at a state university located in western Turkey. Participants were selected voluntarily and engaged in a fantasy story-based writing activity aligned with the research's purpose. The participants' prior knowledge of fantasy literature and analytical psychology was not assessed, and no information on either was provided before the writing activity. The written texts collected from participants served as the primary documents of the study.

Data Collection Process

The study's data were collected through a fantasy story-based writing activity. Participants were asked to write their own fantasy stories in accordance with the guidelines specified for the research. These written products were evaluated to assess students' creative writing skills and the extent to which they reflected concepts in analytical psychology.

Data Analysis

In the study, participants' written narratives served as the primary data source, which were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis was adopted as an approach that systematically identifies recurring patterns, themes, and categories in texts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this context, the collected data were analyzed using MAXQDA 2024, a qualitative data analysis software.

First, the texts were read in detail by researchers, broken down into meaningful units, and coded. Based on these codes, categories were created and then transformed into higher-level themes. During the coding process, both creative writing elements (such as setting, originality, symbols, etc.) and archetypes, a fundamental concept in analytical psychology, were considered to conduct a multidimensional analysis.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the research were attempted to be ensured by considering the credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability criteria, which are trustworthiness measures in qualitative research (Arslan, 2022). To enhance credibility, the coding process was conducted by two independent researchers, themes were reviewed by experts, and quotations from student narratives were included. For transferability, the context, study group, and analysis processes were described in detail. To ensure consistency, inter-coder agreement was maintained, and the process was reported transparently in MAXQDA. For confirmability, all analysis steps were documented, and an audit trail was created. Thus, the scientific validity of the findings was secured.

Ethics Approval

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Social and Human Sciences at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, under decision number 71/72 dated August 29, 2025.

Findings

1. Creative writing elements

Places

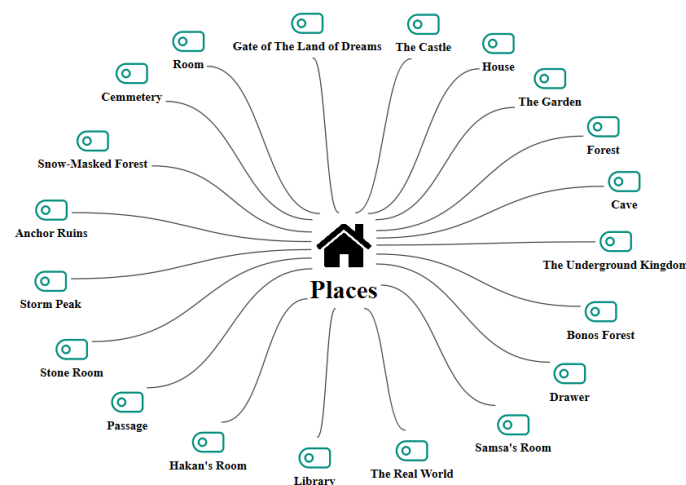


Figure 1: The spaces in the narratives.

When examining the locations mentioned in participants' stories, it is evident that the range is wide. Both everyday living spaces and extraordinary places born from imagination are used in the stories. The diversity of these locations demonstrates that, on the one hand, participants draw on their experiences. On the other hand, they activate their imagination and showcase their creative writing skills. The functional use of spaces is also noteworthy. In some stories, places like forests or peaks stand out as areas of adventure and struggle. At the same time, locations such as cemeteries or underground kingdoms are more associated with themes of fear, uncertainty, and death. Everyday spaces like homes, rooms, or gardens often reflect feelings of safety, peace, and familiarity. This variety indicates that participants actively utilize the concept of space both concretely and abstractly, strengthening the narrative structure and atmosphere of their texts.

Originality

Originality has emerged as a notable concept in the examined fantasy stories. In these stories, it is generally observed that the content of classic fairy tales and mythological elements is reimagined through a modern

narrative style. Each story uses well-known symbols (such as mirrors, snakes, light, stones, the sea, necklaces, dreams, etc.) but assigns them new functions and layers of meaning.

In Participant 3's two-part story, the combination of everyday life and fantastical elements is striking. In the first story, an ordinary summer vacation becomes fairy-tale-like when combined with talking animals; in the second story, traditional fairy-tale symbols such as a necklace, mirror, fairy, and giant are preserved, but the participant personalizes them through their own storytelling style. In Participant 4's story, the transition between everyday life and the mythological/fantastical dimension is skillfully crafted. The lighthouse functions more as a 'gateway between worlds' rather than just an ordinary place. The two-part story structure is also present in Participant 17's story.

In the stories, traditional fantastical motifs are reshaped with themes of individual and psychological transformation.

Symbols

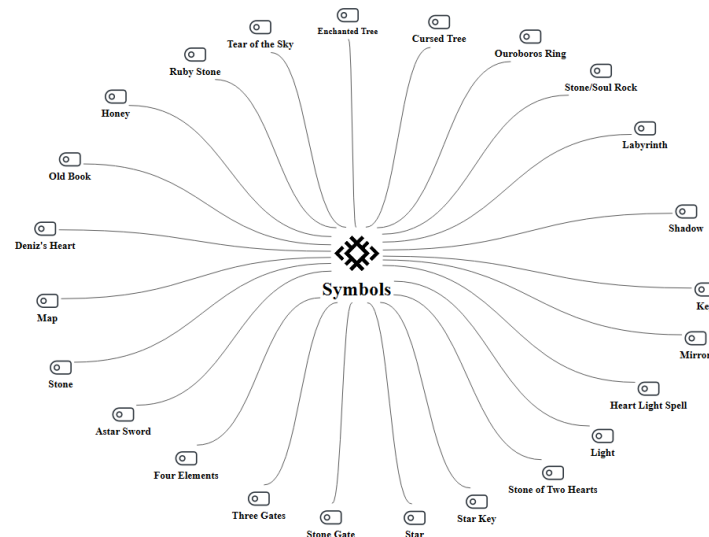


Figure 2: Symbols in the stories

Symbols are the way archetypes express themselves as the language of our unconscious world. The structures of archetypes that cannot be directly seen become visible through symbols. In this regard, symbols carry the deepest powers and knowledge of the psyche, helping the individual achieve psychological wholeness, or individuation. According to Jung (1964), symbols are alive; just as everything in the myth is alive and filled with energy, so too are symbols nourished by psychic energy. Jung defines this energy as the life force of all beings.

In the participants' stories, symbols stand out not only as objects or natural elements but also as metaphors for the characters' inner journeys. The most prominent symbols in the narratives have been identified as follows:

The cursed tree (Participant 2): The tree, which is also seen as a symbol of the self, represents the process of individuation in stories (Franz, 1997: 163). It is also seen as a mother and a healing entity. Its cursed nature in this story stems from its role as the shadow. The hero's

confrontation with internal fears is structured through this symbol.

Ouroboros Ring (Participant 5): This symbol, also known as Uroboros, is a serpent that devours itself. Uroboros is a serpent that forms a circle with itself and bites its tail. It symbolizes continuity and immortality, as well as the alchemical principle of 'one is all'. The snake is considered a guardian of life, immortality, and spiritual riches. Its winding form represents profound wisdom and mystery. Because it can renew its skin, it symbolizes rebirth. According to Jung (2009), the snake is related to the spinal cord and symbolizes the sudden, destructive emergence of the unconscious. It also expresses the externalization of suppressed energy in the subconscious, manifesting as psychological disturbances or inner turmoil. The infinite cycle, wholeness, and the hero's transformation are also symbolized. Time, tradition, and collective consciousness are directly related to it. The ring itself has a unifying, creative, and destructive function (Le Guin, 2006).

Stone / Soul Rock and Labyrinth (Participant 13): While the soul rock offers the hero strength and guidance, the labyrinth represents the individual's inner tests. The light-and-shadow dichotomy is also symbolically processed in this process. Stones touch people because they evoke a sense of immortality. Almost every culture has attributed magical powers such as intense energy, luck, abundance, and healing to pebbles, stones, rocks, and large rocks.

The Three Doors (Participant 18): The door represents a new beginning or gaining a different perspective. The number three signifies need, desire, impulse, and decision-making with willpower from a psychological perspective (Jung, 2015: 221). In the narrative, the three doors symbolize choice, a crossroads, and inner liberation. It is the threshold point where the hero determines the direction with their own will.

The stories examined are quite rich in symbols. Other symbols that participants generally prefer are as follows:

Animal figures (cow, rooster, bird, deer, Samrik bird, peacock, fish): represent fertility, guidance, transformation, and harmony with nature.

Natural elements (forest, sea, storm, sky, lightning, fog): They serve as gateways to the subconscious—especially fog, which symbolizes uncertainty and internal trials.

Objects (chest, staff, container, sphere, sword, enchanted stones, notebook, kopuz): They symbolize the tools and tests in the hero's inner journey. They appear as helpers for the heroes in the examined fantasy stories.

Colors (gold, blue, black, red, green): Seen as reflections of emotions, the subconscious, and symbolic conflicts.

The symbolic expression in the stories is highly vivid, both visually and metaphorically.

2. Archetypes

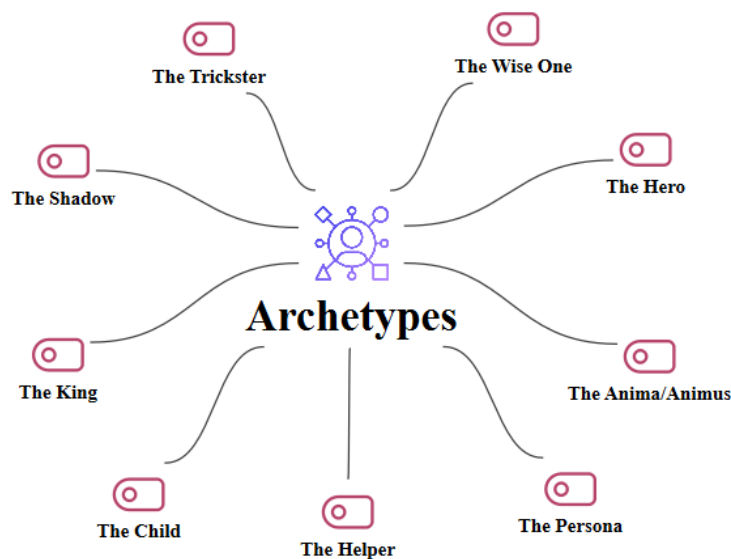


Figure 3: Archetypes in Fantasy Stories

In Jung's (2009) analytical psychology, archetypes are important concepts: symbolic structures that exist in the collective unconscious and are universally repeated in human behavior and narratives. The most commonly seen archetypes in mythology include the hero, the wise one,

the shadow, the anima/animus, the child, the persona, the mother, and the trickster. These archetypes are observed across different cultures and texts; they reflect individuals' internal conflicts, developmental processes, and social roles.

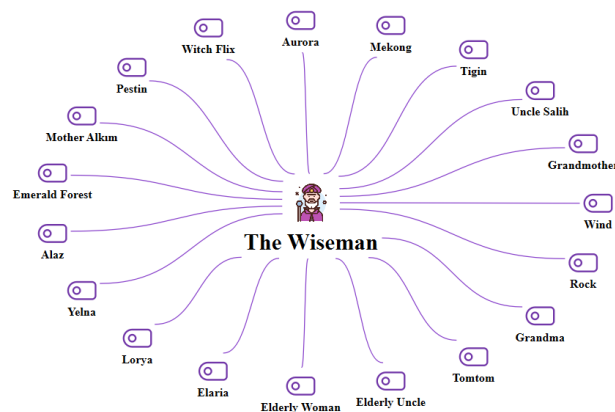


Figure 4: The wise archetype in fantasy stories

The Wise Old Man/Woman archetype is a figure who guides, mentors, and embodies wisdom in an individual's development. This archetype typically appears at critical turning points in the hero's life, providing direction, showing the right path, or imparting the necessary wisdom for solutions (Jung, 2009). The Wise also embodies the individual's inner intuition and the cultural wisdom expressed in the collective unconscious.

Within the scope of the research, the Wise archetype is represented in various ways in the participants' fantastic stories. As seen in Figure 4, this archetype appears through figures directly associated with old age and experience ("Uncle Salih," "Grandmother," "Grandma," "Elderly Woman," "Elderly Uncle"). These characters symbolize traditional authority, life experience, and cultural transmission within family and social contexts.

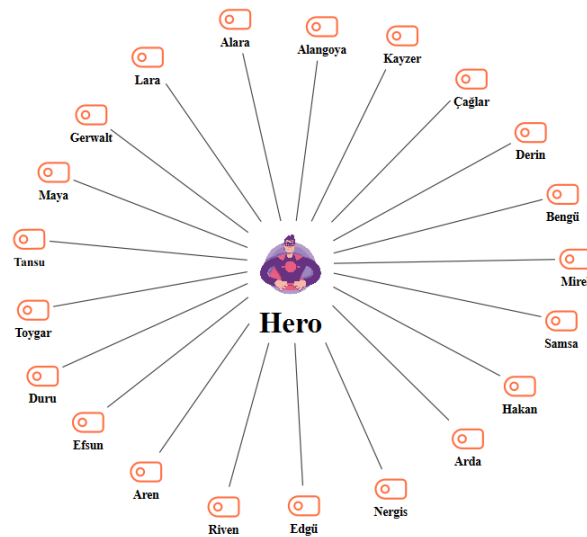


Figure 5: Hero archetype in fantasy stories

The hero archetype is a figure who transforms by fighting against the shadow, the dark side of the unconscious, successfully overcoming tests, and ultimately transforming both themselves and their environment. In this context, the hero is not only a traveler on an individual journey but also a bearer of societal values and cultural ideals. In Figure 4, the twenty stories written by the participants reveal that the hero archetype emerges as a central element, aligning with the cycle identified in

Campbell's (2010) *The Hero's Journey*. The chart brings together hero characters from different stories and demonstrates how widely the archetype is represented. Hero figures are conveyed through both female (Lara, Derin, Bengü, Alara, Alangoya, Duru, Efsun, Nergis) and male (Kayzer, Çağlar, Gerwalt, Maya, Tansu, Toygar, Aren, Riven, Edgü, Hakan, Arda, Mirel, Samsa) characters. This diversity includes heroes of both genders.

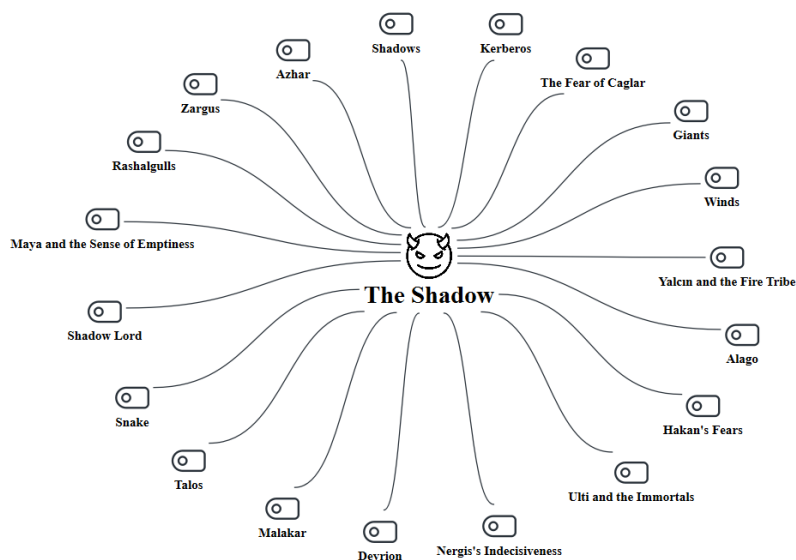


Figure 6: The shadow archetype in fantasy stories

The shadow archetype represents aspects of an individual that are repressed in the unconscious, not accepted by society, or avoided by the person. Although the shadow is often characterized by dark, frightening, or destructive qualities, it also contains the energy that enables the individual's potential growth and transformation. In this study, the shadow archetype appears prominently in the participants' fantastic stories.

As seen in the chart, mythological or fantastical elements such as “Kerberos, Giants, Rashalgulls, Zargus, Malakar, Talos, Snake” indicate that the shadow is represented as an external threat. This diversity shows that the shadow appears in the participants' narratives both as an external enemy and as an internal conflict.

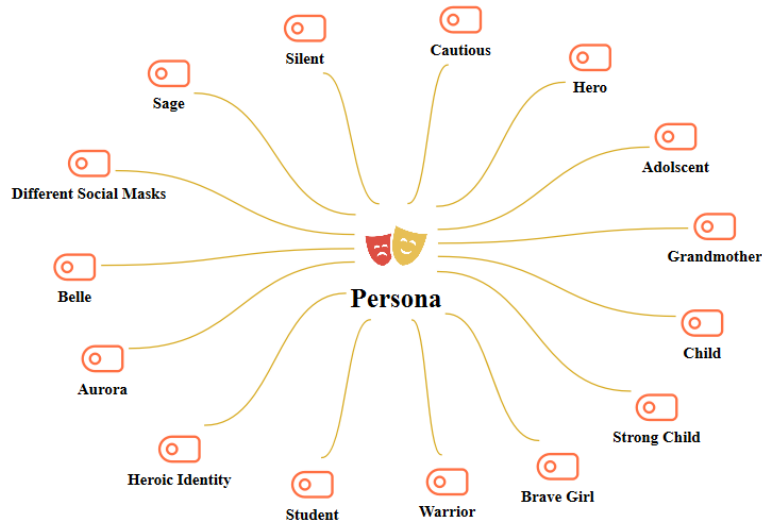


Figure 7: Persona archetype in fantasy stories

Persona refers to the social mask an individual displays within society. It is the interface between a person's true self and the image they present to the outside world. The persona codes that appear in participants' fantasy stories include silent, cautious, hero, warrior, brave girl, strong child, adolescent, student, child, and grandmother.

In participants' fantasy stories, basic archetypes such as the hero, shadow, and wise are commonly depicted. However, some archetypes are represented more briefly. These include the trickster ($f=1$), king ($f=1$), and child ($f=2$) archetypes.

Discussion

The first finding regarding the creative writing elements of the research is that the participants use space not only as a physical backdrop but also as an atmosphere-creating and symbolic element. The use of both everyday and extraordinary places, such as 'The World of Dreams Gate' and 'Storm Peak,' serves a metaphorical function reflecting the characters' inner journeys. This finding aligns with fundamental theories of the fantasy genre. Indeed, Jackson (1981) states that fantasy breaks rational perception and offers an opportunity to connect with the unconscious; similarly, Akçeşme and Özdemir Ağlar (2023) emphasize that the genre provides an ecopsychological and symbolic analytical field. The students' metaphorical use of space in this way indicates that they are engaged in a conscious, creative process that reflects both their relationship to their environment and their inner states.

In terms of originality, another aspect of creativity, participants have been observed to reinterpret traditional fairy tales and mythological elements to create modern narratives. This situation is directly related to Guilford's

(1967) dimensions of flexibility and originality in defining creativity. Participants assigned new functions to well-known symbols such as the “Ouroboros Ring” or the “Soul Stone,” blending collective memory with personal experiences. This finding supports Ünveren's (2020) view that imagination enhances an individual's imaginative expressions and enables the production of alternative narratives.

The most important findings of the study on the psychological axis are the intensive use of symbols and archetypes in the stories. The richness of symbols in the stories (such as trees, mirrors, keys, stones, etc.) aligns with Jung's (1964) description of symbols as the language of the collective unconscious. These symbols mark pivotal moments in the characters' individuation processes. In particular, the central role of the “hero” archetype across all 20 stories further confirms the universality of Campbell's (2010) “The Hero's Journey” model.

The guiding role of the ‘wise’ archetype (such as a grandmother, an elderly woman, or Uncle Salih) in the journeys described by the participants supports Franz's (1996) thesis that fairy-tale archetypes reveal the individual's spiritual development. The participants' association of wisdom primarily with family elders or experienced figures also highlights the role of archetypes in linking wisdom to social values, as noted by Musuloğlu and Sezgin (2023).

Another finding of the research is the way the ‘shadow’ archetype is represented. According to Jung (2009), the shadow is the first and most significant obstacle to individuation. In this study, the representation of the shadow as both an ‘external’ threat (Kerberos, Zargus, giants) and an ‘internal’ conflict (fear, indecisiveness,

feelings of emptiness) shows that participants confronted their repressed sides and fears through this writing process. The fantasy narrative, as noted by Çetindaş (2021), follows a structure similar to that of dream narratives, allowing individuals to express their unconscious in symbolic terms. Students had the opportunity to reflect their internal fears onto external monsters and fight them within a safe literary space.

As a result, this research demonstrates that fantasy writing not only fosters critical thinking, as emphasized by Demir (2019), but also develops a deep emotional and psychological awareness. The texts produced by university students demonstrate their sensitivity to the universal themes of the collective unconscious (the hero's journey, battling the shadow, and individuation). This situation indicates that fantasy writing can be an effective pedagogical tool to support creative expression, symbolic literacy, and psychological wholeness in Turkish language education and across other disciplines.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that participants effectively use creative thinking skills not only at the narrative level but also at deeper psychological and symbolic levels during their writing processes.

The fantasy stories written by the participants offered rich and diverse examples of creative writing, imaginative narration, and symbolic depth.

The stories' originality lies in the reimagining of classical fairy tales and mythological elements through modern, personal interpretations.

Overall, the participants' fantastical stories provide a rich resource for developing creative writing skills. In the stories, the psychological, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions are effectively integrated through space,

imagery, symbols, and archetypes; participants draw on both their personal experiences and imagination to create original meanings. This demonstrates that fantastical storytelling is an effective tool in educational contexts for fostering creative thinking, symbolic reading, and emotional and psychological awareness.

Limitations

Among the limitations of the study is that the sample group consisted of only 20 students who volunteered from a single university. This restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the participants' prior knowledge of fantasy literature and analytical psychology was not measured; this variable may have influenced the diversity of symbols and archetypes in the written narratives.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Participation Permit

Approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Social and Human Sciences at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University for this study (Decision No: 71/72, Date: 08/29/2025).

Publication License

Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Author Contributions

YU has prepared the entire article.

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