

DREAMS AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE NOVEL—A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE WORKS OF JAMES JOYCE AND FRANZ KAFKA

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the basic characteristics of the dreams and the potential of the novel in the works of two great Western writers in the twentieth century: James Joyce (1882-1941) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924). Through the comparison of the similarities and differences in terms of artistic motifs in the composition of Joyce and Kafka, the article highlights the characteristics in the artistic thinking of each author and shows the contributions to modern art thinking.

Keywords: James Joyce, Franz Kafka, dreams, Western literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the flow of modern literature, the motif of dreams and its potential is not merely a psychological phenomenon, but also a unique artistic mode of thought, revolutionary in the structure and language of the novel. Since Sigmund Freud with his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), dreams have become an important means to understand the unconscious, human psychology, and the nature of reality more deeply. This influence has spread into various fields of art, among which modern novels stand out with two representative figures: James Joyce (1882-1941) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924).

James Joyce, with *Ulysses* and especially *Finnegans Wake*, transformed dreams into a complex, revolutionary language where consciousness and the unconscious intertwine, creating a non-linear space. Meanwhile, Franz Kafka, through works such as *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*, used dreams as a bizarre existential space where reality is distorted by absurdity and alienation. Both writers used dreams as a means not only to explore human nature but also to expand the boundaries of the novel. James Joyce and Franz Kafka, with their unique styles and visions, offered two distinct yet complementary paths, demonstrating the infinite potential of dreams in literary creation.

Dreams have long been a phenomenon studied not only in psychology but also in literature, art, and philosophy. In literature, dreams are often used as a tool to express the state of the unconscious, projecting people's hidden emotions, desires, or fears. According to Freud, the dream is “the royal road to the unconscious” (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900). Freud argued that dreams are not meaningless but are a meaningful expression of inner conflicts.

In modern literature, dreams are not limited to reflecting individual psychology but are also used to break the linear structure of traditional novels. Modern authors often borrow from dreams to create non-linear space and time, where real and virtual ideas, past and present, intersect and

blend. Joyce and Kafka are masters in exploiting dreams to transcend the conventional boundaries of the novel.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1 Dreams – A Psychological and Reality Exploration in the Works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka

In modern novels, dreams and the stream of consciousness are not merely narrative elements but also important tools for exploring human psychology and complex reality. The works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka stand out for their skillful combination of dreamlike images and absurd fragments of society, thereby illustrating the internal conflicts and difficulties characters face when confronting the external world.

Dreams in the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka are not just a recreation of fantastical or absurd images, but also serve as a channel for conveying characters' emotions and internal conflicts, opening up a space to explore deep psychology that external expressions cannot clearly reveal. Notably, dreams here are not merely mystical symbols but an important part of the stream of consciousness, reflecting the movement of the human mind when facing personal and social issues.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce constructs a Stephen Dedalus who constantly struggles between his inner world and the external world. Stephen's dream is a reflection of his search for identity and his desire to escape societal constraints, particularly in the context of religion and family. Like many of Joyce's other works, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the dream is not merely a projection of vague images but also a journey, a process of psychological transformation, and an internal revolution.

When Stephen experiences a dream in the chapter "The Dream of the Artist," he recalls the moment he had to confront conflicting images within his family and society. A particularly significant scene is when Stephen dreams of abandoning traditional relationships and beliefs to seek his own path in art. In this passage, Joyce writes: "He saw himself... standing outside the bounds of the world, an outcast among his kind, a lonely artist on the path of creation"[5;208]*. This dream is not just a temporary feeling, but a significant sign of psychological awakening in Stephen's creative journey. The dream not only represents the freedom he yearns for but also marks the beginning of the process of forming and developing Stephen's artistic identity.

However, unlike the dreams in Joyce's work, the dreams in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* are not constructed as a process of self-awareness or a search for liberation; instead, they represent the alienation and crisis of the protagonist, Gregor Samsa. When Gregor wakes up and discovers he has transformed into a giant insect, the space of his dream and reality vaguely intersect, reflecting a complete sense of loss and despair. This reflects a pessimistic view of an inexplicable world where humans are no longer capable of understanding themselves.

Gregor's transformation is not a form of escapist dream, but a true hallucination of human alienation in modern society. Kafka begins the work by describing Gregor's strange dream: "When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect."[2;1].

This is an opening scene for the entire story, representing the breakdown of all concepts of self, freedom, and control in Gregor's life. The dream here is grim, reflecting the floundering of a person in a society that is losing its human values.

Furthermore, in *The Castle*, Kafka continues to use the dream as a form of escape, but it does not bring liberation. The character K. constantly feels surrounded by an invisible system and unable to access the castle — a symbol of power and control. K.'s dream in this work does not lead to an awakening or change, but only further highlights his feeling of being lost and powerless.

For Joyce and Kafka, the dream becomes a means to delve into the characters' psychology, while also reflecting human self-awareness or self-degeneration when facing social, religious, and family systems. While Joyce views the dream as a tool for liberation and self-discovery, Kafka clarifies the characters' powerlessness in escaping invisible and unjust systems. Both authors use the dream as an expression of the invisible battles within the human psyche, reflecting the deep contradictions between reality and illusion in modern life.

2.2 The Blending of Opposites: Reality and Illusion

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, the characters' dreams and stream of consciousness occur continuously, without a clear distinction between dream and reality. Especially in the "Nighttown" chapter, when Leopold Bloom embarks on a hazy journey, strange images and events appear as if in an endless trance. This blending makes it difficult for the reader to clearly distinguish between reality and dream. For example, when Bloom wonders if everything around him is a dream, Joyce writes: "The scene was like a dream from which he was not sure if he could wake up"[6;243]. This is an expression of ambiguity, where the character is no longer certain of his reality.

Meanwhile, Kafka in *The Castle* creates an equally ambiguous world, where the character K. cannot access the castle — a symbol of power and control. K. always feels surrounded by a world that cannot be explained and cannot be changed, like a dream from which he never wakes up. Kafka writes: "Not only was it impossible to get inside, but in fact there was nothing inside either"[4;198]. Both in *The Castle* and *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka creates a space that characters perceive as a dark, inescapable dream, where they cannot control their fate.

Thus, both Joyce and Kafka blur the boundary between dream and reality, but with different purposes. While Joyce uses ambiguity to explore the character's creative freedom, Kafka shows human powerlessness when facing an absurd and incomprehensible world.

One of the special elements in the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka is the ambiguity between reality and dream, a space in which the boundary between what is real and what is illusion is no longer clear. Both authors use this method to highlight the instability in the characters' psyche and reflect the fragmentation of the self, where the boundary between dream and real life seems blurred, making the reader feel the confusion, the incomprehensible, and the paradox of modern life.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce builds complex connections between dream, memory, and reality through Leopold Bloom's journey. A typical example is the scene of Bloom in his dream, where he is drawn into a state of ambiguous space and time, without clearly distinguishing between memory and real events. Especially in the "Circe" chapter, where both Bloom and Stephen Dedalus participate in strange hallucinations, time and space merge, making everything ambiguous. Joyce uses literary forms such as stream of consciousness and interior monologue to make the scenes in the work difficult to distinguish between reality and imagination. For example, when Bloom experiences a scene that he thinks he witnessed from the past, but immediately realizes it was just a disturbed dream. Joyce writes: "He sank into darkness. A shadow glided past. A night in the city. No, it was a day in life. A moment in a dream"[6;243]. This scene creates a space between reality and dream,

where the reader finds it difficult to distinguish between memory, dreams, and what is actually happening.

In this work, the combination of the ambiguous space of dreams and the characters' real lives reflects an inner life full of contradictions and suffering. The scenes in dreams are not merely temporary or escapist, but are signals that the characters perceive about reality and the incomprehensible. Joyce wants to convey that in the modern world, people can no longer clearly distinguish between what is real and what is illusion. This feeling does not only appear in dreams, but also permeates every thought, action, and reaction of the characters in daily life.

In contrast to Joyce, Kafka uses the ambiguity between reality and dream in his works in a metaphorical and symbolic way. In *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka describes Gregor Samsa waking up in a completely different form – he has transformed into a giant insect. Although Gregor is aware of his transformation, the surrounding reality seems unchanged, making the boundary between reality and dream even more blurred. The opening scene of the work begins with an ambiguous question. The story immediately creates an existential problem: How can a person transform into an insect without any apparent change in the world around them? Is this a dream or a real transformation?

Unlike the dreams in Joyce's works, in Kafka, dream and reality do not merge to create an awakening or deep self-awareness. Instead, they coexist in a world where the ambiguity between these elements creates madness and crisis. Gregor not only transforms into an insect but also loses the ability to communicate with his family and society, thereby demonstrating alienation and loss of self. This ambiguity between reality and dream does not offer a solution or awakening, but instead, the ability to understand reality is diminished, leaving the character in a state of delirium.

Another work by Kafka, *The Castle*, also reflects the ambiguity between reality and dream throughout the journey of the protagonist, K., who seeks a way to access the castle but is always blocked by invisible forms of power. K. constantly feels as though he is participating in an ambiguous journey with no clear destination. Kafka describes the world K. lives in not as a realistic world, but as an ambiguous place where fantasy and reality constantly overlap. K. continuously struggles with the limits of a system he cannot explain or understand. Kafka writes: "The castle remained there, but looked like something distant." The image of the castle in the work is not just an illusion but also a symbol of the ambiguity between aspiration and reality that K. cannot reach, nor can he determine whether the castle truly exists.

Through the works of Joyce and Kafka, the ambiguity between reality and dream becomes one of the important elements reflecting the fragmentation of the self in the modern world. While Joyce allows dreams to become part of the characters' process of self-awareness, Kafka uses them to express the characters' loss and crisis in an absurd and incomprehensible world. Both authors use this ambiguity to show the despair and lack of control humans face when confronted with the mental and social issues of the 20th century.

2.3. Dreams and the Possibilities of the Novel

Both Joyce and Kafka use the novel as a tool to reflect the characters' inner world as well as critique society. However, the way they portray dreams and explore human possibilities in society reflects very different views on freedom and helplessness.

In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce transcended traditional narrative forms to construct a surreal and ambiguous world. This work is like an endless journey of characters in a time loop, with language full of metaphors and symbols. The dreams in *Finnegans Wake* reflect a sense of enclosed

time and space, making the characters feel trapped in an inescapable cycle. A notable quote is: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs"[7;3] This sentence shows a perpetual cycle with no clear beginning or end, reflecting a continuous process and the blurred nature of time.

Kafka also uses dreams as a symbol of powerlessness and alienation. In *The Castle*, the character K. always feels lost and finds it difficult to understand and access the processes and systems at the castle, reflecting human powerlessness in facing the invisible forces of society. Kafka writes: "Not only is it impossible to get inside, but in reality there is nothing inside either"[4;198], a statement expressing the meaninglessness and unattainability of society.

Dreams in the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka are not merely moments during sleep but also powerful symbols of personal aspirations, unconscious desires that characters yearn for but cannot achieve. The relationship between dreams and aspirations in these two authors reflects humanity's struggle with themselves and the world around them, where desires and expectations are always limited by the barriers of society, time, and the self.

In James Joyce's work *Ulysses*, dreams are presented as a space for escape and exploration of characters' aspirations. Leopold Bloom, on his journey through Dublin, not only seeks sexual pleasure or social acceptance but also confronts the aspiration for a perfect life, where he can regain personal freedom without being constrained by family or social responsibilities. Bloom's dreams express his yearning for a harmonious and complete life, but this is limited by social conventions and the reality of daily life. In the "The Dream" chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce writes: "He dreamed he was swimming across a vast ocean. The further he swam, the more he felt the freedom in his soul, but when he reached the shore, it was only a reflection of himself"[6;562]. The image of the sea and freedom in Bloom's dream signifies a desire to escape the constraints of life. However, this dream ends in self-realization, as Bloom recognizes that he cannot escape himself. The dream is merely an illusion reflecting an aspiration that can never be achieved in reality.

Similarly, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce continues to explore the relationship between dreams and the aspirations of the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus. As an ambitious young man, Stephen constantly yearns for creative freedom and escape from the constraints of religion, family, and society. The dream of art and the journey of personal freedom is a recurring theme throughout the work. In one scene, Stephen declares: "I will not serve. I will not kneel to anyone, but only kneel before my own will. The world shall be my canvas"[5;214]. These words express Stephen's burning desire to find a path in art and personal freedom. However, just as in *Ulysses*, Stephen's dreams confront the harsh reality of society and the pitfalls of tradition and moral rules, preventing him from achieving what he dreams of.

Unlike Joyce, Kafka uses dreams in his works to portray aspiration not just as a personal journey, but as a hopeless pursuit. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa wakes up to find he has transformed into a giant insect. Gregor's view of this dream is not an acknowledgment or reflection of personal aspiration but a regret for the shortcomings in his life. Before his transformation, Gregor was a responsible man who always sacrificed for his family, but he could not fulfill his personal aspirations because his life process was socialized and restricted. The scene of Gregor's transformation is an image of personal tragedy when the aspiration for freedom and happiness cannot be realized. Kafka writes: "Gregor's transformation was not a dream; it was the punishment for not living for himself"[2;56]. This very transformation is Kafka's way of depicting loss and

alienation in society, where people cannot find a way to achieve their personal aspirations and can only exist in a world full of suffering and misunderstanding.

In *The Castle*, Kafka continues to explore individual aspiration through the journey of the character K. Seeking a way to access the castle, K. has a desire to exercise power and realize personal ideals, but his journey is shrouded in a vague mist of incomprehensible social structures. Kafka writes: "I am not seeking permission. I am seeking recognition"[4;203]. This aspiration of K. is not just a search for personal recognition, but also a battle with the very system he cannot understand. It is the ambiguity of the journey and K.'s never-achievable aspirations that create a sense of confusion and hopelessness throughout the work.

A common point in the works of Joyce and Kafka is that both authors depict a personal struggle in the pursuit of their aspirations. However, while Joyce allows his characters, such as Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, to confront dreams as a space for self-awareness and self-discovery, Kafka reflects the characters' aspirations as a hopeless journey, where dreams and reality are indistinguishable and irreconcilable. This contrast between the journey of individual freedom and the journey of hopelessness is the highlight of aspiration in both works, showing the complexity and limitations in humanity's pursuit of dreams in the modern world.

Both Joyce and Kafka criticize societal systems and structures in their works, but their methods of portrayal are very different. Joyce, in *Ulysses*, shows a multidimensional world where characters can still seek freedom through art and individual creativity. Although the surrounding world is full of contradictions and incomprehensible, characters like Leopold Bloom still find their own path, exploring and creating in daily life. Joyce shows that art and creativity are means of liberation for characters from the constraints of the surrounding world. Conversely, Kafka points out human powerlessness when facing an absurd and incomprehensible world. In *The Metamorphosis* and *The Castle*, Kafka's characters cannot escape the alienation of society and the injustice of the power system. The ambiguity and absurdity in Kafka's works show that humans cannot control their destiny in a world where all efforts are hopeless.

Both Joyce and Kafka criticize bureaucratic systems and invisible power structures through their works, revealing the absurdity in power structures, in unbreakable moral and cultural norms. While Joyce expresses this absurdity through the vague distances between individual desires and social rules, Kafka depicts hierarchical and rigid power systems, from which characters cannot escape no matter how hard they try. This absurdity, in both cases, is not absolute meaninglessness, but rather inexplicable barriers, power structures that push characters into hopeless and dead-end situations.

3. CONCLUSION

Both James Joyce and Franz Kafka explore dreams and stream of consciousness as a means to criticize society and reality. However, their use of dreams in novels reflects very different perspectives on human capability in modern society. Joyce seeks to express creative freedom and the ability to escape societal constraints through art, while Kafka focuses on human powerlessness and alienation when facing absurd social and political structures. The works of both authors provide profound and complex insights into absurdity and the aspiration for freedom in a world full of contradictions and instability.

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