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Fictional Elements in Franz Kafka's "The Castle" and Edwin Abbott's "Flat Land": A Literary Analysis

العناصر الخيالية في The Castle لـ Franz Kafka و Flatland لـ Edwin Abbott

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Abstract:

This paper is a comparative literary review of fictionalism elements in *The Castle* by Franz Kafka and *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* by Edwin Abbott in terms of how constructive imagination works as a tool of political, social, and epistemological criticism. Though these two texts are separated by the time gap, style, and literary movement, they both use some unique fictional techniques to challenge power, social stratification, and the boundaries of human knowledge. Using the method of qualitative close reading that relies on the principles of comparative literary methodology, the study examines such main aspects of fiction as world-building, symbolism, allegory, narrative distortion, and characterization. The findings reveal that Kafka constructs an ambiguous, fragmented bureaucratic universe that reflects modernist concerns with alienation and institutional opacity, while Abbott designs a mathematically ordered two-dimensional society that satirizes Victorian class stratification, gender discrimination, and intellectual rigidity. In both, fictional distortion is not a form of escapism but rather a structuring way of philosophical questioning. The expression of authority, which is expressed either as an invisible bureaucratic abstraction or as overt geometric hierarchy, nevertheless, in each instance, institutional power limits the agency and epistemological growth of individuals. Moreover, the narrative technique as such represents a philosophical tool: the incomplete and fragmented structure of Kafka is the manifestation of existential doubt, and the rational and didactic narration of Abbott is the manifestation of ideological isolation. The paper concludes that fictional construction on both texts is a critical tool by which power and limitation of perception systems are brought to light. Having framed modernist existential ambiguity to become a subject of discussion to Victorian speculative satire, this study proves that fictional abstraction moves across history and continues to be an effective means of literary intervention in the discussions of power, knowledge and the freedom of human.

Keywords: Franz Kafka; *The Castle*; Edwin Abbott; *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*; Fictional Elements; Allegory; Symbolism; Bureaucracy; Institutional Power; Social Hierarchy; Epistemological Limits; Modernism; Victorian Satire; Comparative Literary Analysis.

المخلص:

تُعدّ هذه الدراسة مراجعة أدبية مقارنة للعناصر الخيالية في *The Castle* للكاتب Franz Kafka و *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* للكاتب Edwin Abbott، وذلك من حيث كيفية عمل الخيال البنائي كأداة للنقد السياسي والاجتماعي والإستيمولوجي. وعلى الرغم من الفوارق الزمنية والأسلوبية والانتماءات الأدبية بين النصين، إلا أنهما يوظفان تقنيات خيالية فريدة لتحدي السلطة، والتدرّج الاجتماعي، وحدود المعرفة الإنسانية.

تعتمد الدراسة على منهج القراءة التحليلية النوعية الدقيقة، المستندة إلى مبادئ المنهج الأدبي المقارن، حيث تُحلّل أبرز عناصر الخيال مثل بناء العالم، والرمزية، والاستعارة، وتشويه السرد، وبناء الشخصيات. وتُظهر النتائج أن كافكا يبني عالماً بيروقراطياً غامضاً ومجزأً يعكس انشغالات الحداثة بالاعتراب وغموض المؤسسات، في حين يصمّم أبوت مجتمعاً ثنائي الأبعاد منظماً رياضياً يسخر من التدرّج الطبقي الفيكتوري، والتمييز الجندي، والجمود الفكري.

وفي كلا العملين، لا يُعدّ التشويه الخيالي شكلاً من أشكال الهروب من الواقع، بل يمثل إطاراً بنوياً للتساؤل الفلسفي. فتمثّل السلطة— سواء تجسّد في شكل بيروقراطي غير مرئي أو في هرمية هندسية واضحة—يكشف في الحالتين عن قيود السلطة المؤسسية على فاعلية الأفراد ونموهم المعرفي. كما تمثّل التقنية السردية بحد ذاتها أداة فلسفية؛ إذ يجسّد البناء غير المكتمل والمتشظي لدى كافكا الشك الوجودي، بينما يعكس السرد العقلاني والتوجيهي لدى أبوت حالة من العزلة الأيديولوجية.

وتتلخص الدراسة إلى أن البناء الخيالي في كلا النصين يُعد أداة نقدية تكشف عن أنماط السلطة وحدود أنظمة الإدراك. ومن خلال ربط غموض الحداثة الوجودي بالسخرية الفيكتورية التأملية، تؤكد الدراسة أن التجريد الخيالي يتجاوز الحدود التاريخية، وبظل وسيلة فعالة للتدخل الأدبي في قضايا السلطة والمعرفة وحرية الإنسان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions؛ Edwin Abbott؛ The Castle؛ Franz Kafka؛ العناصر الخيالية؛ الاستعارة؛ الرمزية؛ البيروقراطية؛ السلطة المؤسسية؛ التدرج الاجتماعي؛ حدود المعرفة؛ الحداثة؛ السخرية الفيكتورية؛ التحليل الأدبي المقارن.

Introduction

The fictional worlds have been used long in literature as a method of questioning reality, revealing structures of authority, and investigating human perceptive limits. The Castle by Franz Kafka (Boa, 2002) and Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions by Edwin Abbott (Abbott, 2023) are some of the most thought-provoking pieces of such imaginative construction. Both writings, divided by time, literary movement, and style, create unique fictional worlds, which can be considered effective reproaches to the institutional power, strict hierarchy, and epistemological confinement. The incomplete modernist novel of Kafka describes an inexplicable bureaucratic hierarchy, which is hard to understand, whereas Abbott describes a two-dimensional society, where strict mathematical and social rules are followed, and the structure is geometric. Both writers change the fictional narrative into the philosophic inquiry through radically different fictional strategies. Fictional elements such as allegory, symbolism, speculative setting, narrative distortion, and absurd structure are central to the operation of both texts. In literary studies, fictional elements are not merely decorative aspects of storytelling but structural devices through which authors produce meaning. According to (Abrams, 2018), allegory and symbolism help literary works to express abstract philosophical concepts in the form of concrete narrative representation. Equally, speculative world-building enables authors to condition estranged worlds that replicate, amplify or criticize existing social structures (Suvin, 2000). In this respect, the imaginative distortion in both The Castle and Flatland is not an escapist practice but analytics to explore the state of contemporary life and Victorian inflexibility respectively.

Kafka's The Castle, first published posthumously in 1926, stands as one of the defining works of literary modernism. In many a modernist literary work, the theme of alienation, fragmentation, and anxiety is articulated due to the rapid social and bureaucratic change that took place in the early twentieth century in Europe (Bradbury, 1995). In the novel, K. the protagonist comes to a village of inaccessible Castle where the authorities control the village with their opaque and contradictory bureaucracies. K. is also confined in a maze of an administrative system where logic is unproductive despite his endless efforts to get acknowledgement and authority. Other critics like (Camus, 1996) and (Deleuze, 1986) view the fiction of Kafka as a study of meaninglessness and institution, in which meaning is always deferred. The Castle is used symbolically as a representation of the unattainable power, divine, political or existential, whereas the village is a micro-world of the contemporary alienation. Flatland by Abbott, published in 1884, is part of the Victorian speculative satire tradition. The novella uses the two-dimensional world in which the geometric figures exist with the number of sides being the social status of the figure. A Square narrator slowly comes to realize that there are other dimensions that he cannot perceive. The geometric universe that Abbott created is both mathematical speculation and a stinging social satire. As highlighted by scholars like (Emmer & Crumley, 1992) and (Stableford, 2006), Flatland is a critique of Victorian class hierarchy, gender discrimination as well as intellectual narrowness. The lines are bent into straight ones; this represents the undervalued socially perfunctory role of women, whereas the harsh polygonal hierarchy is an indicator of the societal focus on social division. The idea of dimensional transcendence transforms into metaphorical awakening of

the intellect and the confrontation of the people who do not want to adhere to the institutionalized belief systems. Although the tone and the structure is different, as the narrative given by Kafka was ambiguous and oppressive, and the work by Abbott was satirical and logically designed, both pieces of writing are profoundly involved with the issues of authority and perception. Power in *The Castle* is an invisible mechanism that works via a bureaucratic abstraction, whereas in *Flatland* it is quite visible via a geometric hierarchy that is enshrined in the code. This in both instances is centralized, restrictive, and opposed to challenge power. The idea of power as carried out by (Foucault, 2008) at the time when he conceived that it was diffuse but omnipresent in the institution structures is a helpful concept to learn about such fictional systems. Kafka provides an example of bureaucratic power, which makes people powerless due to the complexity of the procedures, whereas Abbott provides an example of ideological power that makes people think in the same way as those do.

The other important similarity between the two works is that they dealt with the aspect of epistemological limitation. The philosophical study of knowledge and perception epistemology takes the center stage in the two stories. The fact that K. is denied the access to the Castle is not merely a symptom of bureaucratic impediment but an impossibility of man to understand ultimate truth. His search is never complete enough, which strengthens existential doubt. On the other hand, the character of the Square in having to experience the third dimension shows the limits of the world of his two dimensions. When he tries to tell the world about this revelation, he goes to jail indicating that the society is against the increased perception. Cognitive estrangement is often used in Suvin (1979) to argue that speculative fiction tends to challenge the reader on what is thought to be true. Both Abbott and Kafka employ the use of estranged worlds to emphasize the boundaries which are set by social, institutional, and perceptual boundaries. From a narrative perspective, the fictional construction of each text further enhances its thematic concerns. Kafka's fragmented, unfinished structure reinforces ambiguity and existential incompleteness. The lack of a narrative resolution reflects the inability to get clarity in opaque bureaucratic systems. However, Abbott uses the didactic and explanatory tone similar to the discourse of Victorian scientists. The logical organization of his presentation of geometry is what gives the universe of *Flatland* its inner consistency, but this consistency ironically emphasizes its lack of flexibility. Therefore, the fictional world of Kafka is full of uncertainty and instability whereas that of Abbott is one of too much order and limitations. The two extremes can be used to criticize the systems that reduce human agency. Even though a lot of literature has been written on these works separately, there is a paucity in comparing *The Castle* and *Flatland* works. Kafka is usually studied in the framework of existentialism, psychoanalysis and political modernism (Corngold, 2018), whereas the discourse of Abbott refers to the mathematical allegory and the Victorian satire. These texts are seldom studied simultaneously in the perspective of fictional elements as structural processes of criticism. The gap that this research is going to fill is the introduction of these two works into a comparative discussion. Through an analysis of the role of fictional spaces, symbolic spaces, narrative techniques, and speculative misrepresentations in each text, this paper will show that fiction serves as an interrogative tool of power and an unveiling of human incapacity in both authors.

This research has the threefold objectives. First, it aims at finding and discussing the most prominent fictional components at work within each text, such as world-building, symbolism, characterization, and narrative technique. Second, it seeks to draw comparisons on how these aspects operate differently in modernist and Victorian settings. Third, it will also analyze how fictional construction can be a form of philosophical and social commentary. The driving research question of this paper is as follows: How do Kafka and Abbott use the elements of fiction to criticize the systems of authority, social stratification and epistemological constriction? This paper suggests that although the works vary in terms of the

genre and historical context, both authors employ the aspect of fictional distortion as a conscious method of critical intervention. The surreal world of bureaucracy that Kafka creates unveils the absurdity and alienation of the contemporary institutional structure whereas the geometric allegory created by Abbott shows the artificiality of the social hierarchy and intellectual prison. Fictional space, in both works, turns into a metaphorical battlefield on which the confrontation of individual agency and system power is occurring.

Research Question

How do Franz Kafka in *The Castle* and Edwin Abbott in *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* employ fictional world-building and narrative distortion to critique systems of authority, social hierarchy, and epistemological limitation?

Literature Review

Critical Studies on The Castle

Scholarly interpretations of *The Castle* by Franz Kafka have largely centered on themes of alienation, bureaucracy, and existential anxiety. Being one of the canonical works of literary modernism, the novel has often been interpreted as the answer to the disrupted and confused state of the first half of the twentieth-century Europe. Such scholars like (Robert, 1977) say that Kafka used his fiction to depict the desperate case of a person against an impersonal institutional order. *The Castle* itself is often interpreted as a symbolic structure representing inaccessible authority, whether divine, legal, or administrative. According to existentialist critics like (Sartre, 1984), the work by Kafka is taken as pre-announcing existential absurdity, in that there is a constant meaning-seeking among the protagonist K. in the system that remains unclear and therefore, does not provide clear answers. Likewise, (Arendt, 1973) links Kafka to the work of bureaucratic world with development of totalitarian system of administration implying that Kafka predicted dehumanizing logic of modern institutional administration. Politically speaking, *The Castle* has been seen also as an opinionated statement against centralized authority and alienation.

Psychoanalytic interpretations also make it hard to interpret the authority in the novel. According to scholars like (Blume, 1964), the *Castle* can also be associated with the paternal authority or internalized guilt which were personal fears of Kafka. Meanwhile, structuralist critics point at the fragmented narrative structure of the novel as a syllogistic means that was used consciously and reflects the epistemological doubt (Stach, 2021). The incompleteness of the novel supports the thematic emphasis on incompleteness and lack of a resolution. All in all, there is a general agreement that the fictional world of Kafka is not only surreal but also structurally symbolic. The bureaucratic maze and the inaccessible government as the means of dramatizing alienation and the existential insecurity. Such interpretations give a basis of exploring fictional elements as core as opposed to secondary aspects of meaning.

Critical Studies on Flatland

Criticism The dual character of *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, by Edwin Abbott Abbott, has been stressed by criticism. The novella was at first taken by Victorian critics as a geometrical game, but subsequent critical scholars saw its underlying criticism of the hierarchies of classes and intellectual stagnation. (Jann, 1985) says that the geometric society depicted by Abbott is based on the hard stratification of Victorian England where social mobility was strictly restricted. The topic of gender is

one of the most significant areas of analysis of the novella. The culture of Flatland treats women as straight lines that are both restricted in the social and intellectual world. According to the argument by the feminist critics like (Ferguson, 2012), this representation is a reflection and critique of the marginalization of women in the Victorian ideology. The imposed silence and invisibility of the female characters are satirical overstretch of the patriarchal rules.

Philosophical interpretation has also been illustrated in dimensional theory in the novella. According to (Banchoff, 1990), Abbott uses the metaphor of higher-dimensional geometry when referring to intellectual enlightenment and intellectual growth. The face-off of the Square and the Sphere can be taken as the symbol of the struggle to overcome the boundaries of perception. But the fact that the Square was put into prison after his revelation highlights the intolerance of the society to knowledge of transformation. Science fiction theory of estrangement Scientists like (Suvin, 2000) have categorized Flatland as one of the earliest speculative fictions works to engage in cognitive estrangement, in which readers are forced to rethink their conceptualizations of reality by the setting of the story. The instructive tone of the novella echoes the Victorian scientific language, but the satirical under-resonance disrupts the tranquility of the blind faith in rational mechanism. Therefore, the discussions of Flatland as a work are critical, indicating how it combines satire, mathematics and social commentary. The fictional geometrical universe is a logical construct as well as ideological criticism.

Theoretical Perspectives on Fictional Elements

The analysis of fictional particularities in the literature is closely related to the greater theoretical traditions about allegory, symbolism and absurdism. Allegory this term is used by (Fletcher, 2021) to refer to a method of using narrative where characters and events symbolize abstract concepts beyond their literal interpretation. In this regard, fictional worlds are commonly symbolic little worlds of philosophies. The Flatland by Abbott is a clear indication of allegorical tradition, whereas Kafka has made his symbolism deliberately vague. Absurdism and existential fiction also contribute to meanings of Kafka narrative techniques. According to (Camus, 1996) the absurd is the struggle between human desire to have clarity and indifference of the universe that does not speak. This collision is dramatized in Kafka fictional settings via bureaucratic unintelligibility and delay. Absurdist fiction does not conform to consistent interpretation, unlike structured allegory, which supports uncertainty.

There are also effective analytical tools offered by the speculative fiction theory. Brian (McHale, 2003) has suggested that ontological instability, the uncertainty of the nature of reality itself, is often foreshadowed in modernist and postmodernist fiction. Building fictional worlds creates a tactic of revealing epistemological limits. The fact that in speculative texts the physical laws are distorted gives the author power to look at the social and philosophical structures afar. The structuralist theory also highlights the construction of narratives as the process of meaning-making. According to (Barthes, 1977), works of literature use symbolic codes that can attract various meanings. The elements of fiction are not thus incidental adornments. All these theoretical frameworks implicate the argument that the fictional setting, symbolic structure and narrative distortions serve as the tools of analysis. However, with either explicit allegory or blunt absurdity, fictional construction allows writers to experiment with authority, hierarchy, and perception indirectly and with great power.

Authority and Power in Literary Fiction

Political and philosophical theory has been the most common approach to the study of the representation of authority in literature. In his conceptualization of power, (Foucault, 1975) does not see power in the form of centralized possession but rather as a network within the institutional practices.

This model is especially applicable to bureaucratic systems that Kafka had to work with, where power worked invisibly via procedures instead of using physical force directly. The administrative logic that is portrayed in *The Castle* is further explained based on the rational bureaucracy theory developed by (Weber, 1978). Weber is of the opinion that contemporary institutions operate under the principle of hierarchical structure and procedural rationality which tends to create depersonalization. These aspects of Kafka are inflated in his fictional world to expose their alienation.

Classical stratification and ethical control usually become the dominant motifs in Victorian literature. According to (Williams, 1975), the issues of industrial modernization and social stratification were often captured in the fiction written in the nineteenth century. These tensions are reflected in the geometric caste system designed by Abbott where mathematical rigidity is used. Ideological state apparatuses proposed by (Althusser, 2006) are also helpful in realizing how the institutions can control the people by means of ideology instead of coercion. In *Flatland*, religious and educational leaders impose dimensional orthodoxy, which stifles knowledge that opposes it. Therefore, the analysis of power, based on theoretical discourse, proves that fictional worlds can reveal the processes of dominance, which are inherent in social systems. Both Kafka and Abbott use the imaginative exaggeration as a mode of satirizing institutional power and hierarchical inflexibility.

Comparative Literary Approaches

Comparative literary analysis focuses on cross-periodic and cross-genre analysis in order to reveal structural and thematic similarities. (Bassnett, 2006) argues that comparative literature aims to transcend national or even temporal boundaries in order to find out common aesthetic concerns. A comparison between Kafka and Abbott will allow us to engage in a conversation between the ambiguity of modernists and the allegory of (Jameson, 2016) claims that literary texts are symbolic acts or actions in a social context in a reflection of the historical circumstances. In this regard, the two novels provide some codes of criticism about their time. Although the modernism, in Kafka, is a bureaucracy of fragmentation, the Victorian satire of Abbott concerns the strictness of hierarchy and scientific positivism.

Archetypal criticism by (Frye, 1995) is also a helpful perspective because it presupposes that the pattern of narratives is repeated in most literary traditions. The motif of quest that is evident in *The Castle* is similar to the enlightenment journey in *Flatland* though they are different in conclusion. Comparative methodology emphasizes similarities as well as fruitful differences. Kafka does not provide any closure to his open-ended absurdism, but Abbott provides explanatory coherence to his allegorical structure. However, both of them use fictional means as a means of social criticism. This study fills a gap in the scholarship by placing these works in more general comparative contexts. By an act of uniting modernist existentialism with Victorian speculative satire, one should be able to think more profoundly about how fictional construction is able to break the historical frontiers in order to question both authority and epistemology.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in comparative literary analysis to examine the fictional elements in *The Castle* by Franz Kafka and *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* by Edwin Abbott (Abbott, 2023) (Boa, 2002). The fact that the aim of the study is interpretative, but not empirical one, makes qualitative text analysis the most suitable one to be used to investigate the symbolic constructions, narrative strategies, and thematic constructions embedded in the two texts

under consideration. Qualitative research is especially appropriate in the study that tries to explain meaning, discourse and investigate conceptual patterns instead of quantifying variables, as (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) explains. In literature, this methodology permits working closely with textual finesse, ambiguity and symbolic multiplicity. The research employs close reading as its primary analytical method. According to (Tyson, 2023), close reading is the careful analysis of language, images, plot, and symbolic representation with the purpose to detect the hidden ideological and philosophical sense. By applying a systematic textual analysis, this paper will focus on defining the main fictional elements, such as world-building, allegory, symbolism, distortion of the narrative, and characterization, and compare them as to their role in the respective narratives. Instead of seeing fictional devices to the extent of decorative elements, the approach to them as mechanical components of thematic development is taken. Specific focus is made on how each of the authors develops fictional space and authority using narrative form and style. The comparative dimension of this study draws upon established principles of comparative literature. (Bassnett, 2006) suggests that comparative analysis helps a scholar to recognize thematic and structural similarities in texts in varying historical and cultural settings. This study aims to shed light on common conceptual issues by looking at a modernist European novel and a Victorian speculative satire in spite of the genre and time differences. The comparative methodology does not seek to make any direct impact between Kafka and Abbott, but to provide structural parallelism and thematic echo. This type of cross-period comparison makes it possible to receive wider theoretical understanding of the role of fictional construction in the literary criticism.

The theoretical framework within the framework of this study combines modernist theory concepts, allegory studies, power and epistemology theories. Fragmentation, alienation, and ambiguity are the features of the storytelling in the early twentieth century and the major emphasis of the Modernist literary theory (Bradbury, 1995). These values are used to explain the presentation of the narrative strategies in Kafka, especially the incompleteness and obscurity of bureaucratic power in *The Castle*. The ability to look at the geometry symbolism structured by Abbott in *Flatland* would be viewed through the perspectives of allegory theory, especially as proposed by (Fletcher, 2021). Though the symbolism of Kafka does not lend itself to the interpretation, the allegorical design of Abbott is more indicative of the correspondence between the fictional representation and critique of the society. This methodology thus draws the distinction between the open-ended symbolic construction and systematic allegorical mapping and examines both as expressions of fictional critique. Besides the theory of literature, philosophical approach to power and knowledge are also involved in the study. The theoretical basis regarding the understanding of bureaucratic structures in *The Castle* is the conception of institutional power as diffused by (Foucault, 2008) through administrative systems. Likewise, analysis of procedural authority and depersonalization is informed by the theory of rational bureaucracy according to (Weber, 1978). In the case of *Flatland*, the epistemological theory, and studies of speculative fiction, offer an interpretation of support. The idea of cognitive estrangement proposed by (Suvin, 2000) is especially applicable because it describes how speculative environments generate distortion to the empirical reality to reveal ideological presuppositions. The combination of these theoretical views within the methodology makes the textual analysis to be based on the accepted scholarly discourse.

The information to be used in this research is mostly the first manuscripts of *The Castle* and *Flatland* as the focus of the study. Secondary data encompasses peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and critical essays, which put interpretations into the context of academic debates. They have been made available in the academic databases and literature criticism archives to be certain that the credible

and different scholarly perspectives on the subject are taken into account. The secondary source usage does not serve as the alternative to the original interpretation but rather as the opportunity to place the analysis in the context of the research traditions. This is in line with the standards of the qualitative research which prescribe triangulation of views to enhance the interpretative soundness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The process of analysis takes place in three phases. The texts are first analyzed separately to determine the key fictional elements and common motifs. It is at this period that narrative structure, symbolic motives, representations of authority and representations of social hierarchy are recorded and classified. Second, thematic clusters are formulated on the basis of recurrent ideas like bureaucratic power, geometric hierarchy, epistemological limitation and narrative vagueness. Third, comparative synthesis takes place in order to assess the similarities and differences in the functioning of fictional elements in each of the works. This multifaceted method of analysis makes it structurally organized, and the interpretational freedom is not lost at the same time.

The interpretative nature of this research acknowledges that literary meaning is not singular or fixed. As (Barthes, 1977) suggests, texts generate multiple layers of signification shaped by reader engagement. Thus, the work does not purport to have conclusive interpretation but instead suggest a logical analysis structure that has textual support and theoretic backing. Demonstrations of interpretations are textual reference and correspondence with the existing discourse of criticism. It is important to note that this research does not adopt quantitative or empirical methodologies, as the subject matter concerns symbolic representation rather than measurable phenomena. Neither does it strive to historical-biographical analysis except to relevance in context. Rather, it is the constructions of the text and the comparison of the concepts, which is in the focus. This methodological emphasis provides the opportunity to explore fictional mechanisms in a concentrated way as the means of critique. The research is ethically correct in terms of academic citation and intellectual integrity. There is also the proper reference of all theoretical frameworks and critical interpretations to contain the contribution of scholars. Since the study will be based entirely on published literature and scholarly commentary, there will be no human participants or confidential information used.

Result and Discussion

Fictional World-Building and Setting

The analysis reveals that fictional world-building functions as the foundational structural mechanism in both *The Castle* and *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. But this is another kind of construction, where the tone, logic and philosophical implication is quite different. The village setting is described by spatial ambiguity and narrativity instability in the village and the distant Castle in the novel by Kafka. Geography is not established; there is no distance certainty and the authority-villagers communication process is covered with bureaucratic fog. This spatial ambiguity supports what (Hammond, 2009) calls the logic of postponement in Kafka in which meaning is never delivered at any given time. The Castle is in sight but inaccessible which represents the paradox of being close and being inaccessible. The fictional space of Kafka functions according to what is referred by (Casanova, 2004) as a literary autonomy in which the fictional world is separated to the realism to create a sense of existential estrangement. The loss of time also adds to the instability of the narration, hinting that the fight of K. is not within the normal flow of time. The disjointed environment so reflects the psychological confusion of the protagonist and institutional isolation.

Conversely, *Flatland* by Abbott introduces a carefully arranged geometric world in which the laws of mathematics are involved. The plane is two-dimensional and follows a very rigid logic of space in which the geometric form is directly linked to the social identity. (Stewart, 2008) says that mathematical

accuracy, which is found in Abbott is not scientific imagination but a satirical overstatement of Victorian rationalism. Contrasting the ambiguity of Kafka with that of Flatland, the world-building in the latter is internally consistent, and this consistent world-building demonstrates ideological rigidity as such and not the freedom. The findings of the comparison indicate that, on the one hand, Kafka develops a destabilized fictional world, in order to reflect the contemporary alienation; on the other hand, Abbott develops a super-stabilized world, in order to be able to criticize social determinism. Both fictional spaces work metaphorically, serving to reveal the anarchy behind the system of bureaucracy and to reveal the oppression behind the system of rationality. The findings show that world-building in both texts is an active tool of criticism as opposed to a passive setting.

Representation of Authority and Institutional Power

The findings demonstrate that authority in both novels is constructed through fictional abstraction rather than direct representation. The officials of the Castle seldom seem to appear explicitly, but they affect all spheres of life in the village. Such diffuse power structure is compatible with the notion of (Agamben & Hiepko, 2002) on the concept of sovereign power that functions in form of bureaucratic mechanisms that do not clarify but nonetheless, rule. The fact that K. was unable to address the authority directly contributes to the systemic power of the system of institutional dominance. What Kafka describes is a manifestation of what according to (Bauman, 2013) is known as liquid modernity wherein institutions are seen as impersonal systems which control people without any recognizable centers. Power does not belong to an authoritarian but is embedded in procedures. This uncertainty created by ambiguity of official decisions creates an endless cycle of uncertainty, which further strengthens the marginalization of K.

In Flatland, power is more overtly organized yet it is no less tyrannical. The ruling Circles (priests) put ideological control on knowledge through regulation of dimension knowledge. The third dimension is suppressed, and this signifies ideological preservation, in which powerful groups in society suppress knowledge to preserve social sanity (Mannheim, 2013). The incarceration of the Square demonstrates the danger of intellectual deviance to the hierarchy of balance. The hierarchy depicted by Abbott is not opaque bureaucracy as the one of Kafka, but a hierarchy with its hierarchy in plain sight and mathematically coded. Nevertheless, these two regimes share some common results: the individual agency is suppressed, and resistance to the expansion of epistemology is shown. The findings indicate that symbolic presentation of power in both the works is not confined to any particular time in the history of mankind but a general outline of how authority is exercised through institutions. This discussion thus validates the fact that fictional abstraction strengthens and not weakens political critique. In separating the authority and realistic representation, the two authors open up structural processes of power more effectively.

Social Hierarchy and Class Structure

The findings confirm that social hierarchy operates as a defining fictional mechanism in both works. In the Castle, order is not meant in a structured way. The people in authority are not described, but villagers become accustomed to their subordinate role. The modern cultural theory posits that these invisible hierarchies work on symbolic recognition as opposed to being classified formally. Tyler makes an argument that the contemporary class structure tends to be perpetuated by internalized legitimacy and not outright coercion (Wilson & McGuire, 2021). This is the case in Kafka village whereby social status is preserved by adhering to a belief in institutional authority. More recent Kafka criticism also focuses on the fact that the lack of apparent hierarchy makes it more powerful. According to (Sokel, 2002), the bureaucratic regimes of Kafka are working by internalizing their powers on a psychological level,

creating obedience without coercion. The exclusion of the protagonist is therefore social and symbolic and not just procedural.

In *Flatland*, hierarchy is very clear and mathematical. The social rank of people is established by geometric shape and is a result of Victorian obsessions with classification and order. Modern historical work on science and culture in the nineteenth century emphasizes the role played by classification systems in supporting social stratification. (Levine, 2015) believes that hierarchy was often justified in Victorian scientific discourse whose social difference is presented as the natural law. This logic is satirized in an allegory by Abbott which makes hierarchy absurdly literal. Relatively, the uncertainty brought about by the invisible hierarchy by Kafka results in alienation and that brought about by the visible hierarchy by Abbott results in alienation. Both fictional systems show how hierarchy is a stabilizing force of power by restricting movement and justifying exclusion. The findings indicate that imaginary overstatement- either by ambiguity or strict f- is possible.

Epistemological Limits and Perception

The epistemological weakness becomes a common thematic focus in both stories. The Castle also conceals knowledge continuously in the form of conflicting information, incomplete messages and unreachable authority. More recent philosophical accounts of Kafka indicate that epistemic uncertainty is an indication of skepticism toward institutional truth that is characteristic of the late-modern period. According to (Taylor, 1992), the stories of Kafka are dramatic in the way they dramatize the loss of the epistemological confidence in the environment of bureaucratic rationality, where information flows and does not bring clarity. The latter interpretation is also reinforced by the current theory of knowledge production. The work by (Fricker, 2017) stresses a clear idea that epistemic injustice takes place when the institutions have a systematic barrier of access to comprehensions. This unfairness is inflicted in procedural exclusion and fragmentation of information to reinforce epistemological confinement as an element of power by Kafka in his protagonist.

The epistemological limitation in *Flatland* is literally dimensionalized. The failure of the Square to see beyond the three dimensions is an indication of how conceptual frameworks limit knowledge. Recent articles in the area of speculative epistemology have emphasized the role of fictional perception in restricting the dramatization of paradigm confinement. Speculative fiction, (Hayles, 2017) argues, reveals the artificially constructed limits of knowledge by creating a scenario of confrontation between incompatible systems of perception. The punishment meted on the Square by the institutions after his revelation shows how institutions stifle the epistemic growth. The comparative results will indicate that the two novels represent knowledge as socially controlled instead of an individual realization. Kafka focuses on uncertainty and deferral, whereas Abbott focuses on the limitation of perception and ideological stifling. And, as in both examples, institutional structures impose epistemological limits, which strengthen the connection between knowledge and power. Fictional distortion is thereby a vital way of bringing out epistemic constraint.

Narrative Technique and Philosophical Implications

The element of narrative technique is decisive in the philosophical interpretation of the two texts. The disjointed structure of Kafka, the incomplete form of a narrative, and circular patterns of dialogue create the instability of interpretation. Recent narrative theory focuses on the fact that fragmentation is in itself a philosophical meaning. (Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, & Warhol, 2012) points out that, when narrative coherence is disrupted, it demonstrates ontological uncertainty, which encourages the

reader to undergo epistemic instability instead of just witnessing the latter. The form of the narration offered by Kafka is therefore existential indeterminacy and not just the image of it. More recent modernist research also indicates that narrative incompleteness acts as a criticism of rational closure. (Attridge, 2015) asserts that modernist narrative does not want to be completely interpreted so that it can reveal the weakness of rational systems. The impossibility of institutional transparency and existential resolution is supported by the unresolved ending of Kafka.

In contrast, the didactic clarity and rational exposition are used by Abbott in his narrative. Nevertheless, according to recent narratological studies, narration in turn can be objectively criticized. According to Caracciolo (Kirkbride, 2021), ideological assumptions that are usually hidden in the stable narrative voice are revealed when the narrative faces ontological disruption. The overconfident rational point of view that the Square takes in Flatland breaks down in the face of the realities of higher dimensionality, showing the vulnerability of epistemic certitude. The findings show that narrative form is a philosophical tool and not an impartial medium. Kafka achieves the effect of epistemological instability through fragmentation and Abbott through rational narration through which he reveals the ideological confinement. Both approaches turn narrative method into a fictional aspect of criticism, which makes the larger point that fictional construction as such is a form of philosophical intervention.

Conclusion

This literary analysis of *The Castle* by Franz Kafka and *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* by Edwin Abbott explores how fictional elements function as epistemological and political instruments rather than mere imaginative devices. By using contrasting narrative techniques, the two pieces of writing reveal power institutions, rigid hierarchy, and human boundaries of perception. The ambiguity and spatial indeterminacy are created by Kafka to bring out the alienation caused by bureaucracy, and in Abbott, by the use of geometric abstraction to satirize the rationalism and ideological prison under the Victorian era. Recent literature emphasizes that the fiction of Kafka prefigures present-day debates on the problem of institutional opaqueness and existential precarity (Kafka, 1979) (Munro & Huber, 2012). Equally, contemporary reconsiderations of Flatland place the novella in the contexts of the speculative fiction that question the knowledge hierarchy and social order (Stableford, 2006) (Brantlinger, 2002).

As the current research proves, even though the historical context and the stylistic form are varied, both writers use fictional distortion mobilization to explain the mechanisms of the power limitation of intellectual and social mobility. The results indicate that fictional world-building, narrative fragmentation and dimensional allegory are all destabilizing facts of objective reality. Both texts perpetuate the not only uncertain, but also ultimately fruitless, possibility of their perspectives, as opposed to providing a solution, reaffirming the philosophical point of view that knowledge is mediated by institutional and perceptual limits. Finally, this research adds to the modern literary discussion by showing that fictional abstraction is an effective mode of critical analysis in the contemporary and postmodern world to examine the concept of power and knowledge.

Limitation

Although this study is analytically rich, it still has a number of limitations. To begin with, the study is based on the qualitative textual analysis, which is inherently interpretative subjectivity. Although the current approach to literature teaching advocates close reading as an effective academic procedure (Felski, 2020), different theoretical perspectives can have different ways of interpreting the elements of fiction. There are also other critical lenses available, including the psychoanalytic, postcolonial or

feminist theory, which might produce different interpretations that are beyond the research topic of this paper. Second, the comparative scheme is restricted to two major texts. Even though *The Castle* and *Flatland* can be discussed as a source of valuable information due to the focus on fictional abstraction and authority, the corpus may be extended to cover other modernist or speculative works and provide greater generalizability. Modern literary theorists believe that comparative analysis is fortified by intertextual networks (Walkowitz, 2015). This limitation to two texts thus leads to a limitation of the interpretative horizon.

Third, the study does not incorporate archival research or manuscript history, particularly in relation to Kafka's unfinished narrative structure. Recent philology literature emphasizes the significance of textual variations in the Kafka scholarship (Brod, 2025). The current analysis is based more on the accepted editions, instead of comparing the manuscripts. Also, the study is still more of a theoretical one that does not engage reader-response studies or reception analysis. The practical reader study is becoming an essential part of contemporary literary criticism to study the diversity of interpretation (Kulkarni, 2024). Such approaches are not present, which restricts the extent of interpretative validation.

Recommendation

The findings have a number of suggestions that can be made to scholars, educators, and literary researchers. To start with, interdisciplinary interaction must be enhanced. Recent research details the fruitful cross-relation between literary studies and the political theory, sociology, and epistemology (Attridge, 2015). Political philosophy or cognitive science may be included in future analyses of Kafka and Abbott to gain more insight into the concept of power and perception. Second, comparative literary art must be able to leave Eurocentric systems behind through locating fictional abstraction within modernist and speculative cultures all over the world. According to (Walkowitz, 2015), comparative modernism is a transnational contextualization that presents advantages. The inclusion of non-Western texts which confront the issue of bureaucratic or dimensional metaphors would help to widen interpretative horizons. Third, the instructors of these texts must reinstate the fictional form as philosophical argument and not just consider the texts as allegorical tales. In modern pedagogy, the narrative structure is emphasized in the formation of an ethical and political reflection (Felski, 2020). The role of ambiguity, fragmentation and abstraction in generating critical insight can be discussed in the classroom as a result.

Furthermore, it may be possible to use digital humanities tools in order to examine the patterns of bureaucratic language in Kafka or geometric language in Abbott. Innovations in the field of computational literary studies in recent years indicate that digital analysis can be used to supplement close reading (Underwood, 2019). Approaches of this type would increase methodological diversity. Lastly, researchers must not stop investigating the applicability of these writings in the current political environments where political institutions are characterized by institutional opaqueness and epistemic crisis. According to Sussman (Ebarb, 2023), the bureaucratic vision of Kafka reverberates in the contemporary system of government. Likewise, the judgment of dimensional ignorance by *Flatland* is similar to the arguments of ideological polarization and epistemic hermetic by modernists.

Future Research

Further studies may develop such comparative investigation in a number of ways. A potential direction of research is to apply the insights gained about Kafka and his larger oeuvre of work, such as *The Trial* and short fiction, to speculative traditions of allegory. According to recent researches, the narrative

techniques used by Kafka have been predicted in dystopian and absurdist literature later on (Brod, 2025). The extension of the comparative area would help to explain the continuation of modernism and the speculative fiction. The other way would be to reconsider Flatland in the framework of science fiction theory today. Hanan (2021) maintains that dimensional narratives offer useful lines of thought when it comes to science imagination and epistemological discontinuity. Theorists may interpret the use of a geometric metaphor by Abbott as an informational element in future multidimensional fiction in the twenty-first century.

Also, future research would use feminist or post-structural to investigate gender dynamics in the hierarchical system of Flatland especially how women are represented as lines. Gender-based scholarship in recent Victorian studies (Warhol, 1989) can be used to reinterpret the satire by Abbott according to the recent feminist criticism. Empirical reception research might also be done to reveal how the contemporary readers perceive the ambiguity in Kafka in contrast to the dimension allegory in Abbott. The renewed interest in the reader-response theory in twenty-first century literature research (Regan, 2005) has indicated potential opportunities of mixed-method research. Lastly, technological adaptations and redefinition of bureaucratic and dimensional metaphors in the age of the digital world could be a future research topic. With a world that is becoming more and more influenced by algorithmic governance and the virtual realities, fictional forms of inaccessible power and perception to a narrow scope gain new relevance. The field of early modernist abstraction in comparison with digital dystopia may bring much interdisciplinary prospect to the field.

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