

**Dream as a Gateway to Freedom:
A Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of Dream Metaphors in
Laila al-Othman's The Trial**

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Abstract

The study examines how Laila al-Othman presents dreaming as a mental and sensory path that enables freedom for the restricted female protagonist in her 2000 novel *Al-Muhâkama...Maqta' Min Sirat al-Wâqi'* ("The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality"). It applies Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to study twenty metaphorical statements which were identified through detailed analysis of the novel. The physical metaphors for this process of dreaming as freedom – leaving a physical space, elevation above other people, breaking of boundaries or barriers, performance of physical actions that in waking life are impossible – form the basis of four metaphor clusters: movement, escape and transition (30%), flight and elevation (20%), breaking barriers and confinement (20%) and dream-space as an alternative liberatory realm (30%). The physical metaphors for the process of dreaming as freedom explored in this paper are interpreted through the lens of the metaphor theory, CMT. The study uses the framework of CMT to demonstrate how readers cognitively construct the concept of freedom in light of physical restrictions as they encounter this concept in Arabic literary works. The findings of this study are specific to this single corpus of texts that have been studied in this paper and therefore require comparative research to generalise the findings to other contexts and languages.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Cognitive Poetics, Dream Metaphors, Freedom, Gendered Subjectivity, Modern Arabic Fiction, Laila al-Othman.

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الحلم بوصفه بوابة إلى الحرية: تحليل الاستعارة المفهومية لاستعارات الحلم في رواية ليلى العثمان المحاكمة

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية تصوير ليلى العثمان للحلم بوصفه مسارًا ذهنيًا وحسيًا يتيح للبطلة الأنثى المقيّدة قدرًا من الحرية في روايتها الصادرة عام ٢٠٠٠ المحاكمة... مقطع من سيرة الواقع (The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality).

فتطبق الدراسة نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية (CMT) لدراسة عشرين عبارة استعارية جرى تحديدها عبر تحليل تفصيلي للرواية. كما تحدد الدراسة أربع عناقيد استعارية مترابطة، تشمل: الحركة/الهروب/الانتقال (٣٠%)، والطيران والارتقاء (٢٠%)، وكسر الحواجز والقيود (٢٠%)، وفضاء الحلم بوصفه عالمًا بديلاً تحرريًا (٣٠%). وتبين الدراسة أن الحلم يعمل بوصفه طريقًا إلى التحرر عبر استعارات جسدية متعددة، تُقدّم الحلم كعملية مغادرة للمكان المادي، والارتفاع فوق الآخرين، واختراق الحدود، وإنجاز أفعال تبدو عادةً بعيدة المنال. وتوظّف الدراسة نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية في الخطاب الأدبي العربي لإظهار كيف يفعل القراء قدراتهم الذهنية لتكوين مفاهيم الحرية عندما يواجهون القيود. وتظلّ النتائج محصورة في هذا النص وحده، ولا يمكن تعميمها دون إجراء بحوث مقارنة.

كلمات مفتاحية: نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية، الشعرية المعرفية، استعارات الحلم، الحرية، الذاتية الجندرية، السرد العربي الحديث، ليلى العثمان.

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1.Introduction

In the Arabic women's literature of recent years the struggle against patriarchal power takes on another form. While story-telling is still employed as a way of thinking, it is now developed through the mind, i.e. the story-telling is turned into a metaphorical or mental narrative. In addition to this, the current Arab women writers also resort to physical expressions in their novels in order to create a new language for talking about personal freedom and self-determination and to physically express the mind in order to explore individual identity.

This mental language can be studied from an excellent angle in *The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality* (al-Muhâkama...Maqta' Min Sirat al-Wâqi) by Laila al-Othman, the Kuwaiti novelist. In this study, *The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality* will be scrutinized in order to analyze the limitations that surround the female main character in the novel. These limitations are revealed through the household rules and cultural norms that limit her life; physical restrictions which confine her to the bed and restrict her mobility to some areas of the house and her attempt to understand the meaning of life. The novel is presented to the reader in an unorthodox style by merging the main character's dreams, memories and physical sensations in one continuous narrative space. The study will also discuss other literary features. The novel is written in first person narration.

The *Trial* features a "dreaming" area where you fight for your side's freedom against the opposing side's oppression. In the selected novel, the term "dreams" can refer to both the visions that occur during sleep and the wishes that a person has while they are awake that they translate into an imaginative space where they can escape to, whether it be real or dream. In this mental space between reality, the protagonist is able to find freedom that she cannot in reality.

This article uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to explore how the body influences the construction of abstract concepts and ideas such as freedom, agency, time, and emotion. CMT asserts that metaphor is an essential cognitive process and an essential organizer of thought and

experience that organizes reality and behavioral responses. The starting point of this process is the body and its actions. This article outlines how the body and the way it can move, contain, experience force, and orient itself in space and time is the basis of many mental models of abstract concepts that in turn influence our behaviour and experience of reality. Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Methodology (CMT) and its applications have been used successfully in English-language studies of literature and culture, whereas their potential remains largely untapped in Arabic-language studies of literature and culture. Metaphor has scarcely been studied in Arabic women's writing, and then almost exclusively from within a traditional literary framework. In this study, CMT is applied to a body of Arabic writing, specifically to identify the dream metaphors that appear in Laila al-Othman's *The Trial* and to articulate a cognitive model of freedom as revealed in the cognitive structure of the metaphors identified.

This study investigates the ways in which Laila al-Othman uses the concept of dreaming as a liberating element through a network of conceptual metaphors in *The Trial*. A total of twenty instances are analyzed from the novel to map the way in which the concept of dreaming is structured by the metaphorical concepts of movement, transcendence, rupture and imaginative freedom. A close reading of the instances is subsequently undertaken in order to provide a critical interpretation of how these metaphorical concepts render the idea of dreaming in the novel.

1.1. Research Questions:

The purpose of this section is to address the research gap that was identified in the previous one in the light of the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) that underlies this study. Here, the study delves into the formulation of the specific research questions that will be used for the critical analysis that is the subject of the next section. This question deals with the structure and the process of conceptualization of the conceptual metaphors that appear in "*The Trial*".

How does *The Trial* construct DREAM AS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM through a systematic network of conceptual metaphors, and

how do these metaphors cognitively and narratively encode the possibility of freedom for a constrained female subject?

1.2.Sub-Questions:

The research investigates through physical representations how dreaming functions as a transitional process which enables people to move from limited circumstances toward achieving liberty.

RQ2: Which mental structures are involved when we conceive of freedom as liberating us from bodily or societal restrictions by means of the “flight” metaphor?

RQ3: Is it possible to talk about the "dream" as a symbolic space of opposition to the constraint, and if so, what language resources are used?

RQ4: Is the use of dreaming as a 'free area' in a narrative a metaphor for the fact that in a dream goals that in life would be considered utterly unattainable can be achieved?

1.3.Significance of the Study:

This paper can be considered as a contribution to Arabic cognitive linguistics because it relies on Cognitive Metaphor Theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the Kuwaiti novel, which shows that the conceptual metaphors of DREAMS and FREEDOM are not simple literary figures of speech but cognitive scientific tools that explain how the female individual, as a social and political construct in the Gulf area, cognitively conceptualizes her struggle within society.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Cognitive Turn in Literary Analysis:

Lakoff and Johnson established metaphor as a basic cognitive process which shapes human understanding through their 1980 book “Metaphors We Live By”. CMT identifies two types of metaphors which include linguistic metaphors that appear at the surface level and conceptual metaphors which represent basic cognitive structures. The expression "escaping to another dream" in language creates the conceptual metaphor DREAM IS ESCAPE which uses body-based danger-fleeing experiences to represent the abstract dream process.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) further developed their work on embodied metaphor through their study of how abstract concepts emerge from bodily experience. Johnson (1987) showed that image schemas are basic patterns grounded in bodily experiences and that they establish fundamental links among metaphors such as CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, and UP-DOWN. Kövecses (2010, 2015) extended CMT by examining how metaphors operate across different cultural contexts. He showed that bodily experiences generate shared conceptual metaphors, while cultural factors and situational contexts produce variation in metaphorical expression.

This is further supported by Kövecses (2020), who developed the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT) to address previous model limitations by studying environmental elements that influence metaphorical language usage. ECMT presents conceptual metaphor as a multi-level system consisting of image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces. Furthermore, it rejects the absolute distinction between literal and figurative meaning. This development holds special value for literary analysis because novels create detailed settings, which authors use to place metaphors throughout their stories, characters, and central themes. Kövecses (2019) explains that people use metaphors based on four fundamental context types, which include situational factors, social and discourse elements, conceptual-cognitive knowledge, and bodily sensory-motor experiences. This study uses this context-dependent method to study how dream metaphors in *The Trial* develop based on the protagonist's particular gendered, spatial, and affective circumstances.

The study of literary texts through CMT has made major progress through research methods that use corpora and analyze discourse structures. The study by Demjén and Semino (2015) shows that corpus analysis helps researchers identify metaphorical language patterns that exist across different communication styles and settings through the analysis of small qualitative data sets. This new research approach, which demands empirical evidence and clear methods, enables researchers to detect metaphorical patterns by using established evaluation methods instead of relying on personal interpretations.

2.2. Cognitive Poetics and Embodied Metaphor:

Cognitive poetics aims to establish a model of literary communication grounded in the assumptions of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Its central aim is to examine how literary texts are cognitively interpreted by readers. Literary language is thus viewed not merely as an aesthetic feature of the text, but rather as a guiding tool through which readers engage in metaphorical mapping, schema activation, mental simulation, and conceptual blending in order to arrive at an adequate interpretation of narrative discourse. Literary comprehension is accordingly understood as a cognitive event grounded in the principles of embodied cognition and conceptual structure.

Cognitive poetics as a method of literary criticism was introduced by Stockwell (2019), who explains how literary texture results from deliberate linguistic design that guides the reader's attention and shapes cognitive response. Stockwell (2019) subsequently extended this framework by incorporating Text World Theory (TWT), through which readers construct mental representations, or "text-worlds," by processing the language expressed in fictional narrative discourse. This process creates a structured cognitive environment that enables readers to mentally simulate the events, entities, and abstract concepts described in the text.

Of particular relevance to the present study, is the cognitive function of dream sequences in narrative. Dreams in fiction may be understood as alternative cognitive spaces that operate according to different principles than those governing wakefulness. In such spaces, the social and physical restrictions that constrain the protagonist in ordinary reality are either suspended or reconfigured, thereby enabling freedom to function as a conceptual entity even when it cannot be experienced as lived reality. This study draws on this perspective to examine how *The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality* by Laila al-Othman constructs dreams as an independent cognitive and textual domain through which freedom becomes imaginatively accessible to the female protagonist.

The development of cognitive poetics toward an interdisciplinary approach is further evidenced by Jacobs (2015), who introduced the Neurocognitive Poetics Model (NCPM). This model proposes that literary processing is grounded in measurable neural and emotional

processes. Although the present study does not employ empirical neuroscientific methods, Jacobs' model provides additional support for the claim that literary language systematically produces cognitive and affective effects. In the context of *The Trial*, dream metaphors function as foregrounded textual elements that capture the reader's attention for aesthetic and emotional reasons, thereby shaping the reader's response to the central motifs of restriction and freedom.

In recent decades, a substantial body of research has applied CMT and related cognitive approaches to literary and narrative texts. Semino (1997) and Semino and Culpeper (2002) explore how metaphor networks contribute to characterization, narrative point of view, and thematic development. Freeman (2005) and Tsur (2008) document how conceptual metaphors function as organizing principles that underpin readers' understanding of literary form and aesthetic effect. Further empirical and interdisciplinary contributions include work on the cognitive grammar of literary meaning (Harrison, Adolphs, Stockwell, & Yuan, 2014) and on metaphor in trauma and identity narratives (Hamilton, Adolphs, & Nerlich, 2016). Collectively, these studies support the view that literary texts constitute structured metaphorical systems that serve as cognitive frameworks for understanding complex abstract concepts such as freedom, trauma, and identity.

More recently, cognitive-linguistic approaches have also been applied to Arabic and cross-cultural narrative contexts. Khalifah and Zibin (2022) investigate metaphor in an Arabic novel from a cognitive perspective, examining the relationships among conceptual mappings, cultural context, and narrative structure. Jumaah et al. (2020) similarly investigate conceptual metaphors in fiction writing, concluding that perception-based expressions in narrative discourse are grounded in embodied experience. Although neither study focuses specifically on dream imagery, both provide methodological support for applying a systematic CMT-informed analysis to Arabic narrative texts.

Building on cognitive poetics and embodied metaphor theory, the present study examines how *The Trial* shapes the conceptualization of freedom through structured metaphorical frameworks. Through an analysis of dream metaphors in the novel, this study argues that the

metaphorical depiction of dream space transforms spatial, physical, and social constraints into a network of embodied mappings. Through this system, dreaming functions not merely as a narrative device, but as a cognitive process through which freedom is imaginatively constructed and temporarily realized.

2.3. Dream Metaphors and the Cognitive Modeling of Freedom:

Human beings experience dreams both as automatic brain processes during sleep and as future-focused wishes and creative mental images that extend beyond their current situation. Dream language contains multiple meanings which create an optimal setting for developing metaphors through elaboration. Kövecses (2010) explains that people understand abstract concepts, including freedom, through various source domains, which include movement, verticality, light, and openness, thus forming intricate metaphorical systems instead of basic equivalent relationships.

The abstract nature of freedom makes it impossible to experience it through sensory perception, so it requires metaphors to create its structure. People in English and across different languages tend to understand freedom through four main perspectives, which are FREEDOM IS MOVEMENT (“breaking free”), FREEDOM IS OPEN SPACE (“boundless possibilities”), FREEDOM IS UPWARD MOTION (“rising above constraints”), and FREEDOM IS LIGHT (“liberation from darkness”). The research investigates, through *The Trial*, how dream vocabulary enables the activation and development of physical metaphors which exist within the human body (Johnson, 1987).

2.4. Gendered Subjectivity and Constraint in Modern Arabic Women's Fiction:

stories to overcome the social barriers that limit their freedom of movement, their ability to express themselves, and their capacity to make decisions. For example, Cooke (2001) examines how Arab women writers employ Islamic feminist methods to recover religious texts. By contrast, Abu-Lughod (2013) analyzes how Western media constructs misleading representations of Muslim women through a unified story

which fails to show their different experiences and methods of struggle across Arab nations. Similarly, Malti-Douglas (1995) examines how Arabic literary and religious texts use textual methods to establish and challenge gender-based social structures related to power and body composition.

work has begun to apply systematic metaphor analysis to Arabic data. Tay (2024), for instance, employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine HEART metaphors in Arabic and English economic texts, identifying both recurring semantic patterns and culturally specific metaphorical mappings. Importantly, this line of research suggests that robust cognitive-linguistic analysis can yield meaningful insights even when the available dataset is limited, insofar as it reveals the conceptual frameworks underlying metaphor use. In my earlier study, I argued that a dominant conceptual metaphor, “EVERYTHING IS A PRISON,” critically shapes al-Othman’s narrative (Abood, 2024, p. 411). Building on this trajectory, the present study investigates dream metaphors in modern Arabic literary fiction and examines their narrative and thematic functions through a case study of a selected novel. Specifically, it focuses on how dream metaphors reconfigure experiences of restriction and freedom within the text.

The Arabic novel has developed through historical and critical processes, which Allen (2016) explains while showing its focus on modernity, colonialism, and social change. El-Ariss (2019) examines contemporary Arab digital culture, while Mehta (2020) analyzes postcolonial landscapes and resistance narratives. These studies show that Arabic literary works address political matters, social issues, and existential concerns through their complex storytelling methods and linguistic techniques.

Arabic criticism has recently discussed the structural importance of dream discourse in Laila al-Othman’s novel *The Trial*. In his study, “The Narrative Polyphony and the Textual Interrelations in *The Trial*,” Ali Al-Mughaidh affirmed that the intertextual texture of the novel includes “dreams and nightmares,” in addition to religious, literary, and poetic allusions. Thus, dreams are not merely an artistic descriptive device;

rather, they are among the elements that shape the structural system of the novel and organize its meanings. Furthermore, he confirmed that al-Othman linked human freedom with the mind and the freedom of thought. This supports the present study's argument that dreams represent a cognitive space through which freedom becomes imaginable for the individual, even though society surrounds her with many obstacles. In addition, the researcher discussed the textual relations among the elements of the novel and showed how they allow the narrator's voice to expand into multiple voices that speak on her behalf, defend her, and support her cause. This complements the present study's conclusion regarding the importance of dream discourse in representing female agency and modes of resistance in the novel.

2.5. Research Gap and Contribution:

This paper addresses several gaps in the literature. It aims to bridge some of the gaps through Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) to examine the field of Arabic literary discourse through the modern Arabic novel. Although cognitive-linguistic approaches have been identified as beneficial for the analysis of modern Arabic novels, CMT in particular has not been sufficiently explored in the case of Arabic literature as it has been in the case of English literature. This study, therefore, moves away from the literary impressionism method that has been traditionally used and instead employs a more systematic and theory-based approach grounded in cognitive linguistics. The theory of embodiment is employed to investigate how the body and sensory experiences impact the conceptual metaphors employed by the female protagonists in the novel in order to conceptualize the idea of freedom in restricted environments. This study is among the few studies that examine the works of Kuwaiti female novelist Laila al-Othman, who is one of the prominent modern novelists in the Kuwaiti and Gulf literary scene.

This study is limited to twenty textual examples extracted from one novel by al-Othman, with the aim of ensuring methodological and conceptual clarity while providing a chance to extend the scope of the study to al-Othman's other novels, as well as to other Arab female novelists in different literary trends. For the purpose of this study, the corpus was composed of 20 texts selected according to qualitative and

analytical criteria rather than statistical ones. These were obtained by carrying out a detailed analysis of the novel and listing the vocabulary of the dream (words such as *ḥulm*, *aḥlām*, and their derived forms). The data were then selected in relation to the criteria of the semantic field of constraint and freedom, and the sampling was continued until thematic saturation was reached for each individual source-domain mapping, that is, the metaphor clusters (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), until no new examples were found. In this way, the bounded sample allowed for a detailed one-to-one correspondence to be established between the source and target domains of the metaphors, and, at the same time, the corpus was small enough to guarantee exhaustive documentation of the whole text and to allow its replication. The percentages cited in the results section correspond only to the bounded sample, that is, to the number of metaphors that appear in the selected texts and not in the novel as a whole.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design:

This study relies on a qualitative, theory-driven methodology that combines cognitive poetics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). Methodologically, it adopts a bounded single-text case-study approach focusing on Laila al-Othman's *The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality*, where the phenomenon of dreaming is described in relation to constraint and freedom. The case-study design was adopted in this study in order to gain an in-depth explanatory understanding of how metaphorical language structures a particular conceptualization of a given concept within a particular narrative world. This explanation is not meant for statistical generalization, but rather to show how the text presents such a concept within its narrative world.

This study employed a three-stage approach for the analysis of dream-related textual instances and for the identification of the conceptual metaphors, the source-target mappings, and the metaphor system underlying the conceptualization DREAM AS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM. The first stage dealt with dream terminology and with the collection of the cited examples that were in line with the criteria. The second stage dealt with the explanation of the conceptual metaphors and

the source-target mappings of the examples mentioned by applying CMT. The third stage dealt with the clustering of the cited examples according to the source-domain expressions that were repeatedly mentioned in the corpus of examples, thus constituting the metaphor system underlying the conceptualization DREAM AS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM. For the sake of methodological clarity and transparency, the criteria used for selecting the examples were clearly stated; all the examples provided were given in full in the original language (Arabic) and in translation (English); and the procedure followed in the mapping of the source and target domains was clearly explained, so that the researcher's judgments can be reviewed and the study can be replicated and/or developed.

3.2. Theoretical Framework:

1999). The surface manifestations of linguistic metaphors in CMT appear as "escaping to another dream," but the underlying conceptual metaphors function as basic cognitive frameworks which include DREAM IS ESCAPE. The framework shows that conceptual metaphors consistently map physical source-domain elements, such as spatial movement, flying, and bursting through walls, onto conceptual domains such as dreams and freedom. These mappings derive their foundation from human bodily experiences (Johnson, 1987), while following image-schema structures which include CONTAINER, PATH, UP-DOWN, and FORCE.

3.3 Data and Corpus:

The corpus consists of 20 textual instances extracted from Laila al-Othman's *The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality* (al-Muhâkama...Maqta' Min Sirat al-Wâqi), published in 2000 by Dar al-Mada for Publishing and Distribution in Damascus. Each instance includes the Arabic original and English translation by the researcher.

3.3.1 Corpus Construction and Justification:

The 20-instance corpus was constructed through systematic close reading of the complete novel. The identification process required the researcher to study the complete text to detect dream-related terms ("ḥulm," "aḥlām," and their derivatives) that appeared in figurative language describing freedom, constraint, agency, and spatial change. The

bounded qualitative corpus allows the researcher to study defined conceptual patterns through systematic assessment, thus preserving both methodological accessibility and the ability to replicate the study's findings.

This study used 20 textual instances for qualitative case-study purposes instead of following quantitative representation standards. The text contains sufficient evidence to show how metaphors appear throughout the story while also revealing the connections between dream elements and their corresponding targets in the novel. The study focuses on obtaining detailed knowledge from the data instead of producing general statistical model predictions. Most quantitative research suggests that more data are needed to obtain statistically significant results. In this qualitative and comprehensive study, the dataset consisted of $n = 20$ because the samples were selected until the individual source-domain mappings reached thematic saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this context, thematic saturation means that, after an in-depth analysis of the embodied metaphorical language in all excerpts taken from the sample, no new source-domain mappings were added to the data. In this case, the four metaphor clusters identified in the results section were neither modified nor increased, which means that the analysis of the embodied metaphorical language in all excerpts selected from the sample was exhaustive and detailed. The small size of the dataset is due to the need to document the analysis in detail so that it remains as transparent and replicable as possible. Therefore, the percentages provided in the results section refer only to the dataset used in the analysis and do not apply to the novel as a whole.

3.3.2. Operationalization of "Dream": Semantic Categories and Theoretical Justification:

The word "dream" contains three distinct yet related semantic clusters, consisting of: (1) dreams that appear during sleep as automatic mental activities; (2) dreams about future goals that people wish to achieve; and (3) daydreams that people experience during wakefulness in order to create fictional alternative realities. This unified approach is supported by two sources: the structural organization of language and the way humans process mental information. The linguistic properties of the

Arabic word “ḥulm” show the same multiple-meaning pattern as the English word “dream,” including all three semantic categories. The three phenomena share common cognitive elements, including separation from current reality, freedom from normal rules, and the ability to create new mental scenarios. The three dream types share identical image-schematic patterns according to embodied-cognitive theory (Johnson, 1987, pp. 18–137), including leaving the present location, entering a different mental area, and experiencing brief freedom from physical and social limitations.

3.4. Selection Criteria:

The researcher applied a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to the corpus of text samples in order to achieve analytical focus and methodological precision. The criteria acted as a filter so that only certain examples depicting relationships between the concept of dreaming and freedom could be highlighted in the corpus in order to serve as instantiations of the metaphorical mappings that constitute the subject matter of Cognitive Metaphor Theory.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Verbatim quotation only.
- The text contains an obvious figurative marker that uses metaphorical language to connect dream experiences with both complete liberty and restricted movement.

Exclusion Criteria:

The study distinguishes between two ways in which dream terminology appears in writing: literal application and metaphorical usage.

- Metaphors that do not relate to the freedom/constraint axis.
- Paraphrased content (only verbatim quotations are included).

3.4.1. Bias Control and Methodological Transparency:

This study used “clear linkage to freedom semantics” to select instances which contained direct textual evidence showing people moving between places through movement verbs, departure, flight actions, and blocking elements, which included imprisonment, walls, barriers, and actions showing personal control. This study analyzed only those instances

which showed dream vocabulary appearing with freedom/constraint markers in the same sentence or in an adjacent text section.

The analysis did not rely solely on examples that present dreaming as a liberatory force. It also included instances in which dreams appear fragile, unstable, or vulnerable to disruption. For example, the text compares dreams to colored balloons, some of which are easily damaged. Including such instances helped reduce selection bias and ensured that the analysis reflected the full range of metaphorical representations in the novel.

3.4.2. Coding Validation Strategy and Replicability:

This study uses single-analyst coding, which creates two major challenges, since it relies on one researcher to identify metaphors and assign them to clusters. To address this limitation, the study implemented three validation procedures aimed at increasing transparency and analytical replicability: (1) the use of operational definitions to identify metaphor clusters through rule-based criteria; (2) documentation of coding decisions, including the rationale for each cluster assignment; and (3) presentation of the full textual evidence in both Arabic and English, so that readers could evaluate the interpretations independently. Although the study did not include an inter-coder reliability procedure, its full analytical documentation allows other researchers to review the method and attempt further replication.

3.4.3. Translation Procedure and Preservation of Metaphoricity:

The researcher translated all the text examples used in this study from Arabic into English. The researcher adopted the literal-semantic translation strategy (Newmark, 1988), which tends to preserve the source-language imagery that belongs to the target-language metaphor's real-life situation (e.g., actions, objects, or obstacles), at the expense of adopting appropriate and natural English-language expressions. By excluding any possible adequate explanations or links that may lead to the naturalization of the translated text, these metaphors are translated with a minimum degree of explanation; hence, the source-language imagery is preserved. Thus, by translating the metaphors into the target language in a non-explanatory manner and using CMT to analyze them, any possible bias in translating the metaphors can be minimized. For

instance, the Arabic word *hāriban* was translated into the English word “fleeing” (instead of using more appropriate expressions) in order to preserve the DANGER-ESCAPE image schema of the word *hāriban*.

3.5. Limitations of the Study:

While this study provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of metaphorical mappings, certain methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the corpus is bounded to a single novel. The analysis examines 20 verbatim instances from *The Trial* and cannot be generalized to: (a) al-Othman's broader oeuvre, (b) contemporary Kuwaiti or Gulf women's writing, (c) Arabic women's fiction broadly, or (d) Arabic literature as a whole. Claims are strictly limited to this specific text. Multiple texts and authors from different literary traditions need to be studied through comparative research to determine if the discovered metaphorical patterns exist only in this novel or they appear commonly in other works.

The research uses single-analyst coding without any methods to verify inter-coder reliability. The methods for transparency and documentation work to improve replicability, yet the researcher must use their judgment when they identify metaphors and when they assign clusters. Different analysts would probably discover more cases, while they might choose to remove certain cases from the list, or they would place these cases into different categories. The researcher developed their coding framework through data analysis instead of using it before starting the research, which provides stronger evidence but makes the results dependent on the researcher's personal choices.

Third translation creates the possibility that different interpretations will occur. The author translated all Arabic text into English while preserving the metaphors yet translation demands him to choose between different interpretations which affect how readers understand the text. The analysis of readers who do not speak Arabic depends on the translations which the analyst provides.

The research study omitted reader-response approaches from its methodological approach. The research investigates written text

metaphors to detect mental patterns but it does not assess how readers handle these metaphors when they read actual texts. The interpretations of analysts about metaphorical effects in cognitive poetry do not prove how readers actually respond to these effects.

The study faces a limitation because the total number of examples (n=20) prevents researcher from performing statistical tests to analyze metaphor occurrence patterns and their relative importance throughout the entire novel. The percentages (30%, 20%, 20%, 30%) show how the analyzed text data distributes but they do not represent the entire novel.

3.6. Analytical Procedure:

The research process followed a structured method, which started with dream-related metaphor identification through close reading, followed by Arabic original extraction of instances, and then source domain identification through concrete experiential content analysis, and target domain element identification, and systematic source-target correspondence mapping, and, finally, instance clustering based on shared source-domain structures and cognitive and narrative function interpretation.

3.7. Coding Framework:

This study uses thematic coding, which groups the data into four metaphor clusters: (1) Movement/escape/transition (showing freedom through physical leaving); (2) Flight and elevation (showing freedom through rising above); (3) Breaking barriers and confinement (showing freedom through the destruction of physical and symbolic restrictions); and (4) Dream-space as an alternative liberatory realm (showing that the dream exists as an independent experience). The researcher used successive stages of analysis to identify these clusters because the textual data showed recurring patterns of source-domain organization rather than pre-defined categories.

3.8. Reliability and Validity:

This study maintains transparency through three main methods, which include presenting all Arabic texts with English translations and complete source-to-target mappings, and showing full textual evidence

for readers to assess interpretive accuracy. The research design uses a bounded single-text case-study approach, which focuses on deep analysis and strong research methods rather than statistical data representation in order to create a path for upcoming comparative studies.

4. Results

4.1. Overview:

The research analyzed twenty metaphorical statements through systematic analysis to confirm the fundamental conceptual metaphor which states DREAM IS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM. The data points are distributed across four separate clusters, which are organized according to the structural patterns of the source domain. The four clusters contain 30% of instances which show movement, escape, or transition (6 instances); 20% of instances which show flight and elevation (4 instances); 20% of instances which show barrier-breaking and confinement (4 instances); and 30% of instances which show dream-space as an alternative liberatory realm (6 instances). The percentages show how the 20 instances are distributed within the bounded corpus, but they do not provide any information about the entire novel.

Table 1 shows an inventory of the four metaphor clusters which includes their main source domains and conceptual frameworks and specific examples. The following sections 4.2 through 4.5 provide an in-depth analysis of each cluster.

Table 1: Metaphor Cluster Inventory

Cluster	Source Domain	Conceptual Metaphor	Count (%)
Movement/Escape/Transition	Spatial mobility, departure, pathways	DREAM IS ESCAPE, DREAM IS JOURNEY	6 (30%)
Flight and Elevation	Upward motion, aerial movement	DREAMS ARE FLYING OBJECTS, FREEDOM IS	4 (20%)

		UP	
Breaking Barriers/Confinement	Walls, imprisonment, rupture	DREAM IS BREAKING BARRIERS, CONSTRAINT IS CONTAINER	4 (20%)
Dream-Space as Liberatory Realm	Alternative spatial domain, practice field	DREAM IS PRACTICE SPACE; DREAM IS OPEN FIELD	6 (30%)

4.2. Cluster 1: Movement/Escape/Transition Metaphors

The first cluster (6 instances, 30%) conceptualizes dreaming through spatial mobility—fleeing, wandering, seeking pathways. The metaphors present freedom as a process of traveling between different places which shows that liberation involves leaving places of restriction to reach areas of potentiality. The fundamental image schema of PATH enables people to view dreaming as their progress through a specific path.

Table 2: Source-to-Target Mappings for Movement/Escape Cluster

Source Domain Element	Target Domain Element	Entailment
Physical departure/flight from danger	Entering dream state	Dreaming = escape from threatening reality
Destination/refuge location	Dream-state itself	Dream = safe alternative space
Movement along pathway	Progression through dream experience	Dreaming = journey with direction

A paradigmatic instance describes the parents' separation:

يزوع كل منهما مره هارباً لحلم آخر .

(Each of them retches, once more fleeing toward another dream.)

The linguistic metaphor "fleeing toward dream" (hāriban li-ḥulm ākhar) establishes the metaphor DREAM IS ESCAPE which shows how people use dreaming as an escape from dangerous situations. The dream serves

as a protective space which uses its geographical and psychological elements to represent the freedom people need to escape their unbearable current situation. The verb "hāriban" (fleeing) shows physical actions which show how people escape dangerous situations at high speed. The source-domain structure of this text presents dreams as an active process of mental avoidance which people use to escape from their thoughts and existence.

4.3 Cluster 2: Flight and Elevation Metaphors

The second cluster (4 instances, 20%) uses flight and elevation to represent dreams through vertical movement and transcendence. In these instances, freedom is conceptualized as ascent, suspension, and release from ordinary restriction. As noted in my earlier study, the novel expresses “the yearning for freedom, using the metaphor of flight to convey the transformative power of dreams and aspirations” (Abood, 2024, p. 421). This supports the present analysis of dream metaphors as embodied mappings in which upward motion functions as a central source domain for imagining liberation.

Table 3: Source-to-Target Mappings for Flight/Elevation Cluster

Source Domain Element	Target Domain Element	Entailment
Upward flight/levitation	Experiencing dream	Dreaming = rising above constraints
Gravity/weight pulling downward	Social/patriarchal constraints	Constraints = downward force
Fragility of flying objects (balloons punctured)	Vulnerability of dreams to destruction	Freedom via dreaming = precarious

الزمن) في ذات الوقت حنون يترك لنا بضعة أحلام كما البالونات الملونة بعضها يطير يجد له مكاناً في الفضاء، والحياة، بعضه تفتقه هبة نسيم أو رأس دبوس

(Time, at once gentle, leaves us a handful of dreams like colored balloons—some drift away, finding a place in the sky and in life, and some are burst by a passing breeze or the tip of a pin.)

The metaphor "dreams like colored balloons... some fly" creates a metaphor which turns dreams into flying objects by applying balloon characteristics such as lightness and ascent and vulnerability to dreams. The verb "fly" demonstrates how to rise against gravitational force

which enables people to achieve liberty through their ability to transcend restrictions. The metaphor shows how dreams completely disappear through the representation of balloons getting pierced. The dual system which includes flight and puncture functions to show how dreams offer freedom but remain vulnerable to random events.

4.4. Cluster 3: Breaking Barriers and Confinement Metaphors

The third cluster (4 instances, 20%) uses imprisonment and enclosure and walls and rupture to create freedom which emerges through violent acts that destroy physical and symbolic limits. The core image schema is CONTAINER, with waking life as bounded enclosure and the dream as barrier-breaking exit.

Table 4: Source-to-Target Mappings for Breaking Barriers/Confinement Cluster

في الحلم لا أكون تلك السجينة المحرومة . أراني وقد اخترقت الجدران، ولجت الشارع

(In the dream, I am not that deprived prisoner. I see myself having pierced through the walls, having entered the street.)

The core section of the novel establishes dream as the main entry point through which readers can access the story. "I am not that prisoner" negates waking-life imprisonment, while "pierced through the walls" (ikhtaraqtu al-jidrān) instantiates DREAM IS BREAKING BARRIERS. Physical rupture appears in dreams which show how dreams represent boundary violations through their content. "The street segment "Entered the street" (walajtū al-shāri') shows how the protagonist transitions from being trapped inside to experiencing the outside world through the public area which allows him to move freely while engaging with society. The CONTAINER schema organizes the entire metaphor by showing that waking life exists inside a limited space which has walls that block movement and dreaming represents a forceful escape from this space.

4.5. Cluster 4: Dream-Space as an Alternative Liberatory Realm

The fourth cluster (6 instances, 30%) presents the dream as an independent space which lacks boundaries and allows people to experience things that are normally forbidden in their waking lives. The metaphors in the text show the dream exists as its own reality which

follows its own rules instead of demonstrating it as a way to escape or fail under limitations.

Table 5: Source-to-Target Mappings for Alternative Realm Cluster

Source Domain Element	Target Domain Element	Entailment
Practice field/training ground	Dream-space	Dream = space for rehearsing agency
Performing prohibited actions	Experiencing freedom in dream	Dream = space where rules are suspended
Granting/receiving gift	Accessing freedom	Freedom = something bestowed in dream

أحلامي تحقق لي أشياء كثيرة. عدا أنها تمنحني الحرية، أمارس كل ما لا أستطيعه في اليقظة

(My dreams achieve many things for me. In addition, they grant me freedom; I practice everything I cannot do while awake.)

The metaphor “grant me freedom, I practice everything I cannot do while awake” establishes DREAM IS PRACTICE SPACE by showing that dreams function as hands-on learning areas which allow people to perform forbidden activities. The verb “practice” (umārisu) shows that people can enhance their abilities through purposeful skill development achieved by repeated practice. The dream serves as an active mental practice which goes beyond being a simple inactive fantasy. The dream world shows everything that can be practiced, but waking reality shows everything that cannot be done, which creates an alternative space with its own set of rules. The dream world operates under its own set of rules, which allow the dreamer to practice everything she wants to do.

4.6. Summary of Findings:

The evaluation of 20 direct speech examples reveals that DREAM serves as an entry point, which allows people to experience freedom through particular metaphorical links. The novel presents dreaming as a cognitive, spatial, and experiential mode of accessing freedom through four connected clusters, which include: escape/transition (spatial departure), flight/elevation (vertical transcendence), barrier-breaking (boundary rupture), and alternative realm (suspended prohibition). The source domains, which stem from physical experiences of body movement, vertical positions, enclosed spaces, and powerful forces,

create actual frameworks which help people understand freedom through both mental and storytelling processes when they face limitations.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpreting DREAM AS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM:

The research shows that the author uses multiple sources to create dreaming as an entry point which enables people to picture their freedom. The four metaphor clusters function as connected mental frameworks which together present dreaming as a process of transition and transcendence and rupture and alternative possibility. The network demonstrates how the author employs systematic physical metaphors to depict dreaming as mental activity which allows the restricted character to achieve freedom through mental travel.

5.2. Mobility and Escape: Freedom as Transition

People use movement-based metaphors to demonstrate that freedom exists through transformation rather than as an unchanging entity, according to 30% of respondents. People experience freedom through active movements, which involve their escape from danger, and their search for new routes, and their search for different locations. Kövecses (2010) shows through his study that people need to use various source domains to understand complex ideas because these domains include distinct aspects of human experience. The PATH schema establishes cognitive organization through its structure, which defines constraint as the current undesirable location HERE, and freedom as the destination THERE, and dreaming as the process of moving between these two points. The protagonist experiences domestic and social immobility through her body, which leads to a spatial-kinetic understanding of her situation, so any form of movement becomes her path to freedom.

5.3 Flight and Elevation: Freedom as Detachment

The metaphors in cluster 2 (20%) create a structured link between physical vertical experiences and freedom through their depiction of how freedom develops through actions which fight against gravitational forces. The UP-DOWN schema exists as a widespread image schema which appears across different languages (Johnson, 1987) to create basic concepts about power (POWER IS UP) and control (CONTROL IS UP)

and moral value (GOOD IS UP). The Trial presents verticality as a system which grants people their freedom through their ability to escape from social pressures which push them downward. The metaphor contains both positive and negative elements because balloons exist as fragile objects which break easily when objects pierce them or when they face powerful wind currents. Dreams possess a dual character which enables people to rise above their present circumstances yet they do not protect dreamers from harmful forces which endanger their aspirations.

5.4. Rupture and Boundary-Crossing: Dreaming as Symbolic Resistance

The third cluster which represents 20% of the data shows that dream analysis uses confinement and rupture metaphors to understand the dream as a symbolic form of resistance. The CONTAINER schema which Johnson (1987) created functions as a fundamental system to understand human spatial awareness because it structures our experiences between being inside and outside and between being enclosed and exposed and between being confined and free. The novel presents waking life through its depiction of imprisonment which includes walls and barriers that create enclosed spaces. Dreaming creates a violent process which breaks through obstacles while it shatters walls and frees people from their enclosed spaces. The protagonist demonstrates control through wall-breaking in the metaphor which simultaneously exposes her confined existence in her normal life. The dream contains two separate elements which demonstrate its function as an artistic method to overcome restrictions.

5.5. Dream-Space as Liberatory Realm: Practicing Agency

The members of cluster 4 (30%) view the dream as an unbound sensory experience that has no boundaries and continues endlessly while all rules become nonfunctional. The main character enters a fresh setting that follows its own set of rules, which differ from the real world, instead of attempting to break free from limitations or defeat challenges. People need to experience things through direct, hands-on activities when they practice because they must repeat their actions to develop their skills. The dream functions as a practice space for mental and emotional operations that enable the protagonist to gain control through fake liberty

experiences, although she remains without real liberty. The mental simulation process, which Stockwell (2020) explains in cognitive-poetic theory, enables people to generate imaginary experiences that produce the same mental and emotional effects as actual events.

5.6. Contributions to Cognitive Poetics and Metaphor Studies

This study provides multiple insights that benefit cognitive poetics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and Arabic literary scholarship, although it recognizes its limited ability to make general statements.

This study applies CMT to Arabic literary studies through its detailed examination of a significant modern Arabic novel. The findings remain specific to this one text because no additional studies exist to validate them. The study shows that cognitive-linguistic frameworks work well for Arabic narrative prose through its demonstration of how Arabic literary contexts contain the same embodied metaphorical structures that English-language studies have identified. The study provides essential methods that scholars can use to conduct future studies comparing different languages and literary traditions.

This study uses systematic corpus-based methods that follow cognitive-linguistic theory instead of the conventional impressionistic approach to literary analysis. The complete disclosure of all data instances, coding criteria, and analytical procedures allows researchers to evaluate the methods and reproduce the results, which enhances methodological rigor in cognitive-poetic literary analysis.

The method delivers specific analysis of dream metaphors which function as mental structures which people use to understand freedom during times of limitation. The research shows that literary text metaphors function as organized mental and storytelling systems which represent complex experiences through specific patterns. The evaluation of four linked metaphor clusters demonstrates that researchers can identify standard conceptual relationships by using suitable analysis methods when they study a restricted set of texts.

This study introduces new knowledge about Laila al-Othman's writing through her important work, which requires additional academic study in

modern Gulf literary studies. This analysis of *The Trial* provides a foundation for future comparative studies across her oeuvre and in relation to other Arab women novelists.

6. Conclusion:

This study analyzed how Laila al-Othman uses *The Trial* to establish DREAM AS A GATEWAY TO FREEDOM through its organized network of conceptual metaphors. The analysis of 20 verbatim metaphorical instances, extracted through systematic close reading, reveals that the novel employs a single metaphorical framework which describes dreaming through four distinct conceptual models that include spatial departure, vertical transcendence, boundary rupture, and the practice of otherwise-impossible agency.

This study identifies four distinct metaphor clusters which exist in a state of mutual connection. The movement and transition metaphors (30%) present freedom through two concepts which describe how people leave restricted areas to reach areas where they can achieve their goals. The flight and elevation metaphors (20%) show how people achieve freedom by rising vertically into the air, which allows them to escape social constraints, yet remain aware that most dreams eventually fail. Dreaming functions as a symbolic form of resistance because its metaphors of rupture and boundary-crossing (20%) demonstrate its ability to break through walls and escape confinement. The alternative-realm metaphors in dream-space (30%) present dreaming as an independent experience which allows people to break free from rules and exercise their personal power.

This study adds value to cognitive poetics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory through its analysis of systematic metaphors which appear in Arabic literary texts. It shows that human bodily experiences with movement, verticality, containment, and force enable people to understand abstract concepts such as freedom through narrative stories. This study presents its methods through complete documentation, which enables scholars to evaluate its results and enables future researchers to study different methods for comparison.

The findings of this study of *The Trial* remain specific to this work because they do not allow researchers to apply them to al-Othman's complete body of work, to Arabic women's fiction, or to Arabic literature in general without conducting additional comparative studies. The single-text case-study design uses deep analysis and strict methodological approaches to create a research design that other scholars can apply to different datasets.

The study may be extended in several directions to strengthen its findings and broaden its scope. First, future research may examine dream metaphors across al-Othman's novels in order to identify shared patterns and distinctive features. Second, it may investigate dream metaphors in novels written by Arab women authors to determine whether al-Othman employs distinctive metaphorical patterns or whether similar patterns appear in other authors' literary works. Third, future studies may employ reader-response approaches to explore how readers interpret dream metaphors in literary texts. Fourth, comparative research may investigate dream metaphors in English and other languages in order to determine whether such metaphors are universal or culturally specific. Finally, future research may examine the development of freedom metaphors in the works of Arab women writers across different historical periods.

The study demonstrates that dreaming functions as a mental route that allows women to visualize their freedom during times of restriction. The findings apply only to this particular novel, while establishing a basis for studying Arabic women's writing through comparison; however, they do not represent final answers about Arabic women's writing in general.

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