

Philosophical And Psychological Analysis Of The Oneiric Space In G. V. Pryakhin's Novel *Mirage*

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Abstract

This article offers a philosophical and psychological analysis of the oneiric space in G. V. Pryakhin's novel *Mirage*. It argues that dreams in the novel function as a privileged domain of moral self-awareness, where the protagonist confronts suppressed guilt, existential anxiety, and the disintegration of ethical coordinates in late Soviet society. Drawing on the theories of Freud, Jung, and Lotman, the study demonstrates how Pryakhin transforms the dream from a private psychological phenomenon into a site of ethical reckoning and spiritual catharsis.

Keywords: Georgy Pryakhin, *Mirage*, oneiric space, dream, conscience, trauma, moral catharsis.

Georgy Pryakhin's 1995 novel *Mirage* occupies a distinctive place in post-Soviet literature not only for its documentary fidelity to historical events—such as the Spitak earthquake or the collapse of ideological structures—but also for its profound engagement with the inner life of its protagonist through the medium of dreams. Unlike conventional narrative devices, dreams in *Mirage* constitute a coherent philosophical and psychological system: they are not mere reflections of subconscious impulses but active agents of moral cognition, sites of confrontation with guilt, and spaces where ethical clarity emerges amidst societal disintegration. The oneiric space thus becomes the novel's central epistemological and existential field—a realm where truth, obscured in waking life, is finally revealed.

The protagonist, Pavel Nikitich, functions as both narrator and moral witness. A journalist and former Soviet official, he embodies the contradictions of his era: complicit in the system yet tormented by conscience, emotionally detached yet yearning for authentic connection. His dreams do not serve escapist or compensatory functions; rather, they expose the dissonance between his public persona and private self. As Sigmund Freud noted, dreams are “the royal road to the unconscious” [2, 53], but in Pryakhin's hands, they become more than that—they are the royal road to conscience. The dream about the flayed cattle, for instance, appears after Pavel's return from Spitak. He sees a herd standing “crimson, pulsating... skinned alive... not a single moo escapes the herd” [7, 312]. This vision is not symbolic abstraction but visceral reprocessing of trauma. The silence of the suffering animals mirrors Pavel's own speechlessness in the face of catastrophe—a silence that, paradoxically, speaks louder than any official report. The dream forces him to acknowledge what he had intellectually registered but emotionally evaded: “After the hell in Armenia, he understood that there is sin” [7, 315]. Here, the oneiric space catalyzes moral awakening, transforming passive observation into active ethical responsibility.

This function of dreams as moral tribunal recurs throughout the novel. The vision of the “old woman with a crutch,” who threatens to “show him the road” that “gleams with lead and sorrow,” directly addresses Pavel's extramarital affair with Chara [7, 267]. Though never explicitly condemned in waking life, the relationship is relentlessly scrutinized in dreams. The old woman's “long, winged, otherworldly-piercing eye” [7, 268] functions as an allegory of divine or ancestral judgment—a gaze that sees through social justifications and exposes the core of moral failure. This aligns with Carl Jung's concept of the dream as a compensatory mechanism that restores psychic balance by confronting the ego with repressed contents of the collective unconscious [3, 211]. In Pavel's case, the collective unconscious manifests as inherited moral norms—loyalty, fidelity, responsibility—that clash with his personal desires. The dream does not punish; it reveals. And in that revelation lies the possibility of change.

Pryakhin further complicates the psychological dimension by blurring the boundaries between dream and reality. The novel's very title, *Mirage*, signals this ontological instability. As Yuri Lotman observed, "the world of dreams is a space resembling reality, yet simultaneously not real" [5, 156]. In *Mirage*, however, it is waking reality that often appears more illusory than dreams. The bureaucratic rituals, ideological slogans, and performative relationships of Soviet life are depicted as hollow simulations—"plastic insects on a synthetic carpet," as in the protagonist's first dream [7, 12]. In contrast, dreams, however nightmarish, possess emotional authenticity. The dream of the "lemon-yellow color of death," for example, conveys existential dread with such intensity that it transcends metaphor: the color "burns away flesh... leaves nothing for life to cling to" [7, 278]. This is not poetic embellishment but phenomenological truth—the raw affect of a consciousness confronting finitude and meaninglessness. The dream becomes a form of existential testimony.

Moreover, Pryakhin employs dreams as a means of temporal synthesis. The "ordered dream" of his mother—prompted by his wife's suggestion to "order" a dream by gazing at a photograph—demonstrates how the oneiric space bridges past and present [7, 242]. In this vision, Pavel finally addresses his mother with the intimate "ty" (you), something he never dared in life: "In life, I didn't manage to switch to 'ty' with her" [7, 245]. This moment is not sentimental nostalgia but psychological integration. The dream allows him to resolve a decades-old wound of filial guilt, thereby reclaiming a fragmented identity. Such dreams function as acts of symbolic restitution, aligning with contemporary trauma theory, which posits that narrative reconstruction—especially in altered states of consciousness—is essential for healing [6, 89]. Crucially, the oneiric space in *Mirage* is not solipsistic. While rooted in individual psychology, it resonates with collective historical trauma. The covered monument in Pavel's dream—"representative... yet hidden so no one knows whom it honors" [7, 231]—encapsulates the ideological limbo of perestroika: a society unable to bury its past or articulate its future. Similarly, the recurring image of the "third man" in bed with Chara, who morphs into a "Chinese" stranger [7, 187], reflects not only personal jealousy but the profound alienation of late Soviet subjectivity—where even intimate relationships are mediated by suspicion, secrecy, and ideological otherness. Thus, Pryakhin's dreams operate on dual registers: they are simultaneously private confessions and public allegories. The culmination of this oneiric trajectory is the final dream, which contrasts sharply with earlier "gloomy, crooked" visions [7, 407]. Pavel stands by the sea; a ship sails in the distance; a wave "born by the laws of mighty music" lifts him gently [7, 408]. This dream is not escapist fantasy but earned harmony—the result of moral labor performed in the dream-space. It signifies catharsis, not through resolution of external conflict, but through internal realignment. The sea, a traditional symbol of the unconscious, now appears luminous and ordered, suggesting that the protagonist has integrated his shadow and achieved a fragile but genuine peace.

In conclusion, the oneiric space in *Mirage* serves as the novel's ethical and philosophical core. Through dreams, Pryakhin constructs a counter-reality where conscience speaks unfiltered, trauma is metabolized, and moral agency is reclaimed. Far from being marginal episodes, dreams are the primary site where the novel's central question is answered: how to remain human in an inhuman time. In a world of mirages—ideological, emotional, historical—the dream becomes the last refuge of truth.

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