

# Elements of Surrealism in Franz Kafka's "A Country Doctor"

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## Abstract

This research article focuses on elements of surrealism in Franz Kafka's "A Country Doctor." Franz Kafka is regarded as one of the most prominent figures of the twentieth century. He wrote many great novels and short stories, some of which were published after his death by his friend Max Brod. Kafka's stories and novels require many levels of interpretation. Some belong to the tradition of existentialism, totalitarianism and surrealism. "A Country Doctor," one of his most famous short stories, represents the work in the tradition of surrealism, a significant and avant-garde movement in the twentieth century led by André Breton. The story exemplifies two major characteristics of Surrealism which are its dreamlike quality and absurdity. This research article explores Kafka's use of these two elements to reveal the protagonist's hidden messages and the absurd situations he is caught in.

**Keywords:** Franz Kafka, Surrealism, dreamlike state, absurdity, 'A Country Doctor'

## ลักษณะสำคัญของคติเหนือจริงในเรื่องสั้นของ ฟรานซ์ คาฟคา เรื่อง "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์"

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยชิ้นนี้ศึกษาลักษณะของคติเหนือจริงในเรื่องสั้นชื่อ "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์" ของฟรานซ์ คาฟคา ฟรานซ์ คาฟคา เป็นนักเขียนที่มีความโดดเด่นที่สุดในศตวรรษที่ 20 เขาประพันธ์นวนิยายและเรื่องสั้นที่มีชื่อเสียงหลายเล่ม ผลงานสำคัญบางชิ้นของเขาได้รับการตีพิมพ์หลังจากที่เขาเสียชีวิตด้วยวัณโรค งานเขียนของคาฟคาสามารถตีความได้หลากหลาย ไม่ว่าจะเป็นการตีความตามแนวคิดของอัตถิภาวนิยม (existentialism) ลัทธิรวบรวมนอำนาจ (Totalitarianism) และคติเหนือจริง (Surrealism) "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์" เป็นเรื่องสั้นที่เป็นตัวแทนของงานในแนวคิดคติเหนือจริง ซึ่งเป็นขบวนการทางวรรณศิลป์ที่เกิดขึ้นในฝรั่งเศส และมีองเดร เบรอตง (André Breton) เป็นผู้นำคนสำคัญ "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์" เป็นตัวอย่างของเรื่องสั้นที่มีองค์ประกอบของคติเหนือจริงอยู่สองข้อหลักคือ ภาวะเหมือนฝัน (Dreamlike state) และความไร้สาระ (Absurdity) บทความวิจัยฉบับนี้มุ่งที่จะศึกษาลักษณะสำคัญสองประการของคติเหนือจริงในเรื่องสั้น "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์" ที่คาฟคาใช้ในการเปิดเผยถึงสิ่งที่ซ่อนอยู่ภายในของตัวเอกและสภาวะของความไร้สาระที่ตัวเอกต้องเผชิญ

**คำสำคัญ** ฟรานซ์ คาฟคา คติเหนือจริง ภาวะเหมือนฝัน ความไร้สาระ "อะ คันทรี ดีอกเตอร์"

## 1. Introduction

Franz Kafka, a prominent Czech short story writer and novelist, is considered one of the most remarkable figures of the twentieth century literature. He was born in an upper-middle class Jewish family in Prague. After graduating in law from Charles Ferdinand University of Prague, he worked at an insurance company. De la Durantaye (2017) states that Vladimir Nabokov considered Kafka “the greatest German writer of our time” (p. 317). He remained employed at the insurance institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia until 1917 when he became sick with tuberculosis. Kafka retired from work in 1922 and died of the disease in 1924. During his lifetime, he published just a few collections of stories including “The Metamorphosis”, “The Judgment”, “In the Penal Colony”, and “A Country Doctor.” His immense reputation as a writer came after his death. Before his death, Kafka requested that Max Brod, his good friend, destroy all of his unpublished manuscripts, but instead of complying with his will, Brod published Kafka’s great novels **The Trial**, **The Castle**, and **Amerika** as well as a collection of shorter pieces.

Kafka had a miserable childhood due to a tyrannical and oppressive father: “The figure of Kafka’s father overshadowed his work as well as his existence. In his imagination this coarse, practical, and domineering shopkeeper and patriarch who worshipped nothing but material success and social advancement belonged to a race of giants and was an awesome, admirable, but repulsive tyrant...The some of Kafka’s despair lies in a sense of ultimate isolation from true communion with all human beings...” (Luebering, 2017, p. 2). Undoubtedly, Kafka’s world is not a pleasant one; it is filled with nightmare, isolation, and alienation.

Kafka’s short stories belong to the contemporary mode. That is, the short story as a literary genre has gone through different stages of development. In the nineteenth century, the short story had formed into an art form with unique characteristics: traditional plot line, extraordinary or supernatural surface content and traditional symbols. Major writers include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. The next stage of the development is a modern mode in which major figures include James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Joseph Conrad. In the modern mode, the plot line does not rise too much and the stories end either without resolution or with epiphany.

The story presents everyday experience involving ordinary people in real settings. In the third stage which is called the contemporary mode, the stories are strange and bizarre: “Contemporary writers find no guarantee as to the authenticities of the ‘real’ world...; plots are truncated, distorted, or abandoned; metaphor and symbols convolute, turning in upon themselves” (Rohrberger, 1979, p. 7). Franz Kafka is one major representative of the contemporary mode who experiments with elements of Surrealism which are major characteristics of the stories in this mode. This research article aims to explore Franz Kafka’s “A Country Doctor” which demonstrates his use of dreamlike quality and absurdity, the two major elements of Surrealism.

## 2. Reviews of Literature

Surrealism is a cultural movement during the early twentieth century with Paris as the center. It was influenced by Dadaism, an avant-garde art movement during World War I. The book *Revolution of the Mind : the Life of Andre Breton* by Mark Polizzotti is a full length biography of Andre Breton who is regarded as a leader of Surrealism. Polizzotti (1995) thoroughly explores Breton’s intellectual and personal life in many aspects such as the deep involvement with Dadaism, the establishment of Surrealism, the experiments with automatic writing and the intense friendship with many of the contemporary great thinkers. Polizzotti (1995) notes that the publication of *Manifesto* “consolidated Breton’s stature as a leader, not only in the eyes of his circle but to the public as well” (p. 213). The biography covers the period of World War I to the early 1960s.

In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton (1972) discusses the aims, the meaning, and the political position of the movement. In the first *Manifesto* (1924), Breton (1972) gave famous definitions of Surrealism:

Surrealism, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner-the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control

exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

Encyclopedia, Philosophy, Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton, 1972, p. 26)

Breton (1972) discusses how he and his colleagues were interested in Sigmund Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, especially the significance of dreams and a subconscious life. He points out about dream and reality: "I believe in the further resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak" (p. 14).

Breton (1972) concludes that Surrealists are not influenced by conventional patterns, so they are considered nonconformists: "Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete nonconformism clearly enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense" (Breton, 1972, p. 47).

Breton (1972) emphasizes Surrealism's concepts about conscience: "...Surrealism attempted to provoke, from the intellectual and moral point of view, an attack of conscience, of the most general and serious kind,..." (p. 123). Surrealists tend to believe that "there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions" (Breton, 1972, p. 123). Breton (1972) concludes at the end that man "is still free to believe in his freedom. He is his own master, in spite of old clouds which pass and his blind forces which encounter obstacles" (p. 187).

The book *Introduction to Surrealism* by Matthews explores Dadaism and its impacts on Surrealism, its fall, and the emergence of Surrealism. The book describes major characteristics of Surrealism. The desire for complete freedom "remains

characteristic for all who evolved toward Surrealism,... *The Manifesto of Surrealism* proudly proclaimed Surrealism to be 'our absolute nonconformism,' evidently to be developed at the expense of the claims society would impose upon the individual" (Matthews, 1965, p. 42). Surrealism is also concerned with individuals: "Man must seek and find his freedom now; he must establish means to bring into his experience, and into that of others, a sense of discovery, revelation and conquest, which Surrealism claims can come only from within man himself" (Matthews, 1965, p. 49). The book also explores dreams, another major characteristic of Surrealism: "Surrealism has as its essence a desire to draw upon and even imitate dream experience" (Matthews, 1965, p. 62). According to Georges Hugnet as cited in Matthews (1965), the dream "tells the truth; it is revolutionary" (p. 64). Surrealism is obviously concerned with dreams: "The dream interests Surrealists because, in Hugnet's phrase, it has the capacity to 'tear up the real'. In this sense dreaming becomes an instrument in Surrealism's revolt against the world of the conventional" (Matthews, 1965, p. 64). The Surrealists' world is one of absurdity, without logic: "That they should be drawn to dream experience is no surprise when one considers how dreaming guarantees incongruity and a notable release from logical restraint" (Matthews, 1965, pp. 65-66).

In *Dada and Surrealism*, Hopkins (2004) provides a brief historical review of Dada and Surrealism, avant-garde movements, and describes how these movements established a dialogue between art and life. Hopkins (2004) explores the unconscious aspect: "...it is safe to assume that the 'darker,' unconscious aspects of our psychic lives which were celebrated by both Dada and Surrealism, are now widely thought to be 'positive' things" (Introduction). He also points out that in Andre Breton's 1924 *Manifesto*, Surrealism was said to be "based on the belief in the superior reality of certain previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the disinterested play of thought" (Hopkins, 2004, p. 17). Regarding the concept of dream, Hopkin (2004) wrote: "Central as dreams were as subject matter for Surrealist artists, the process of transcribing them visually necessitated considerable conscious deliberation. As various commentators pointed out, this was counter to the ideal of bypassing the control of reason" (p. 18). The concept of reality versus dream was also focused: "Here the emphasis was on the artist finding an object in the external world which

corresponded to unconscious requirements, hence reinvigorating the relations between inner and outer reality” (Hopkins, 2004, p. 21).

In *Surrealism and the Novel*, Matthews (1969) points out that Andre Breton had a negative attitude toward a novel because novels were associated with realism: “He reacts sharply, condemning the meticulous care which is characteristic of the novelist who writes within the realist tradition” (p. 3). However, *Surrealism and the Novel's* focus is “to consider texts of sufficient variety to provide evidence that surrealist ambitions impose upon the novel requirements which carry certain formal implications” (Matthews, 1969, p. 7). The characteristics of Surrealism are investigated in selected novels such as Michel Leiris’ *Aurora*, Joyce Mansour’s *Les Gisants satisfaits*, and Maurice Fourré’s *Tête-de-Nègre*.

In the article “A Problem in Analysis: Franz Kafka’s ‘A Country Doctor,’” Leiter (1958) scrutinizes the story from the point of view of form and analyzes it from philosophical, psychoanalytical, and theological viewpoints. As the story occurs in the atmosphere of dream, readers may find it difficult to interpret the meaning of the story. To understand what controls the form can be a helpful method: “The first barrier to understanding will be surmounted if we can describe the principle which governs the form and reach an understanding of the unity underlying multiplicity” (Leiter, 1958, p. 337). The readers should also be aware of “the complexly organized form of compared and contrasted images” (Leiter, 1958, p. 338). There exist relationships among scenes, actions, people, and images which contribute to the understanding of the character: “This principle of reflected relationships describes an organization generated from sentence to sentence, from one vantage of existence to another downward, expressing a state of instability, ambivalence, or frustration” (Leiter, 1958, p. 388). Regarding the philosophical viewpoint, the article focuses on existentialists and the absurd: “Interpreted thus, ‘A Country Doctor’ comments on man, who, buffeted by the scheme of things, is unable to transcend the part assigned him by the absurdity of that existence” (Leiter, 1958, p. 340). The psychoanalytical viewpoint can also contribute to the interpretation of the story: “To work from a psychoanalytical orientation in interpreting ‘A Country Doctor’ is a valid means of procedure, and might cast light into many corners which the philosophical interpretation failed to illuminate” (Leiter,

1958, p. 342). The theological viewpoint is concerned with the interpretation of the doctor's role as a god figure because in the story it is his main responsibility to cure everyone. When the villagers lost faith in the doctor, he feels helpless: "The people's mistake has been to worship a god of science (medicine), who should cure all man's ills, physical, not spiritual. When he fails, they strip him and turn away. He sees the materialistic world without spiritual values" (Leiter, 1958, p. 346).

In the book *Doestoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Kafka*, Hubben (1962) considers the four writers as Europe's most mysterious writers who "have contributed to shaping the modern mind and have exerted an influence upon Western thinking that is only now beginning to be recognized in its full dimensions" (p.5). Hubben (1962) explores Kafka's works in various aspects. Kafka's theme "is an ever-present sense of guilt, perhaps sin, and this guilt is being revenged on those who are unable to recognize their moral burden... The fact that some of Kafka's characters do not know of their guilt receives an added interest from the psychoanalytical experience that the true object of any analysis is not the recovery of earlier and disturbing traumas but the recall of the lost memory of them" (Hubben, 1962, pp. 142-144). In addition, Hubben studies Kafka's life and his diary, which reveal his personality. For example, his diary indicates that he "was aware of the lack of any true foundation for life, of air, and of a guiding code and commandment" (Hubben, 1962, p. 152). However, there is no in-depth analysis of Kafka's novels and short stories in Hubben's book.

"The Art of Projective Thinking: Franz Kafka and the Paranoid Vision" examines projective thinking as paranoid in Kafka's fictions: "Kafka did indeed have imaginative access to a peculiar, distorted vision of the world and made that vision the basis of his art" (McElroy, 1985, p. 218). Such projective thinking "is often associated with attempts to deal with aggression and power. This brings us to the second constituent category of the paranoid viewpoint, hostility, the feeling of living in an overwhelmingly hostile world" (McElroy, 1985, p. 222).

The concepts of accusations and reproaches are also examined: "In Kafka's fictions, accusations and reproaches are the principal mechanisms of hostility turned against characters deliberately though not necessarily rationally" (McElroy, 1985, p. 224). His protagonists are also analyzed. They are either forced or blunder into

another world. Most of Kafka's protagonists "find themselves the objects of unwanted and often hostile attention,..." (McElroy, 1985, p. 224). Kafka's works cited in the article include "The Judgment", *The Trial*, and *The Castle*.

In the article "A Theology of Illness: Franz Kafka's 'A Country Doctor,'" Manson (2005) discusses the theme of duty and faith which are related to the theological aspect. For Kafka, the concept of "duty" is concerned with Christian theology. The doctor in the story "alludes to the religious definition of duty as self-sacrifice" (Manson, 2005, p. 300). Manson (2005) notes that there are some scholars such as Patrick Bridgwater and Malcolm Pasley who claim that Kafka is influenced by Nietzsche's work: "Nietzsche was an atheist. He welcomed the decline of religious faith and sought to subvert the religious justification of duty. This stance is central to the theme of 'A Country Doctor.' Kafka agrees with Nietzsche that faith is declining: the doctor is not an atheist, but he lacks faith in a deity" (p. 304). Manson (2005) also explores the notion concerning illness with emphasis on the spiritual symbolism of the wound and the connection between Nietzsche's concept of wound and Kafka's: "Kafka adopted Nietzsche's metaphors but used them for opposite purposes. He disputes the 'instructive' value of illness and uses the metaphor of a wound to illustrate the doctor's impotence and incompetence. He also recycles Nietzsche's metaphor with macabre humor: when the physician looks deeper into the wound, he does not find 'an abundance of tender Yeses'; he finds worms!" (p. 306). Manson (2005) analyzes Kafka's personal life when he struggled with many things such as his rebellion against his father, his indecision about marriage, his duty as citizen, and his duty as a Jew.

The article "Interpretation of Dreams and Kafka's 'A Country Doctor': A Psychoanalytic Reading" explores Kafka's "A Country Doctor" in which the plot is based on the human psyche. Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretations of Dreams," which is the text of psychoanalytic dream interpretation, is mainly applied to analyze the story's nightmarish aspects: "Kafka's 'A Country Doctor' is set in a nightmarish place; the readers are not informed directly or indirectly about the date or the name of the country. This is comprehensively a surreal image of the place where passing the time is neither natural nor tangible" (Mirmobin and Shabanirad, 2015, p. 3). Being naked in front of strangers and being utterly powerless to alter the painful situation is related to,

according to Freud as cited in Mirmobin and Shabanirad," the memory of the dreamer's earliest childhood" (Mirmobin and Shabanirad, 2015, p. 4). The id, ego, and superego which are the three parts of the human personality are the means to portray Kafka's characters: "The country doctor represents the ego, conscious thinking. In addition, the struggle between the doctor and the groom reflects the conflict between id and ego. The groom can be regarded as his id and his libertine unconscious which indicates the desires of the doctor for sexual intercourse with Rose" (Mirmobin and Shabanirad, 2015, pp. 4-5).

### **3. "A Country Doctor"**

Kafka (1993)'s "A Country Doctor" is the short story that exemplifies two major elements of Surrealism which are a dreamlike quality and absurdity. As a surrealist work, the story's emphasis is more on the dream world which allows the subconscious mind to be explored than on the reality of the external world: "Kafka's work belongs to a tradition of storytelling that seeks to glimpse the truth beyond the immediate, material world" (Manson, 2005, p. 297). Throughout the dream, the protagonist's inner conflicts are exposed, causing him to experience the painful absurdity of life. Mirmobin and Shabanirad (2005) point out psychological aspects of Kafka's stories: "Psychology is one of the main factors to be considered in any approaches for analyzing Kafka's work...The absurdity of life, physical and psychological savagery, and child-parent conflicts are some of the main themes of his works" (p.1). McElroy (1985) discusses Kafka's world in his fictions: "What Kafka has done is to take an intuition of the world, a sense of experience, which is peripheral to the vision of most of us most of the time, and make it central to his fiction... Kafka did indeed have imaginative access to a peculiar, distorted vision of the world and made that vision the basis of his art" (pp. 217-218). Kafka's negative views about the world during his period significantly affects the way he depicts his characters and shapes his stories. Hubben's (1962) criticism of Kafka accords with McElroy's discussion: "Kafka's pageant of accusation occupies the foremost rank among the recent European prophecies of doom. A considerable time before the First World War and then in the years immediately

following, he expressed the terror of life in such unforgettable images that comparisons with classical writers suggest themselves” (p. 138).

In “A Country Doctor,” Kafka uses the first person point of view to tell the story which contributes to a high degree of immediacy and intimacy. That is, the readers could feel very close to the I-Narrator and could witness the actions as if they were there. The settings are bizarre and unfamiliar: “Kafka’s ‘A Country Doctor’ is set in a nightmarish place; the readers are not informed directly or indirectly about the date or the name of the country. This is comprehensively as surreal an image of the place where passing the time is neither natural nor tangible” (Mirmobin and Shabanirad, 2015, p. 3). The scenes in the story are held together by the presence of the protagonist, a country doctor as a tragic hero who is battling with his inner conflicts.

At the beginning of the story, the reader is introduced to the I-narrator, the country doctor, who appears to be very responsible and committed to his duty. He is greatly aware that he has to meet his obligation to his patient: “I was in great perplexity; I had to start on an urgent journey; a seriously ill patient was waiting for me in a village ten miles off; a thick blizzard of snow filled all the wide spaces between him and me;...” (Kafka, 1993, p. 164). However, the doctor is facing many obstacles. His horse happens to die that particular day, and Rose, his servant girl, could not find any horse for him, making him despair: “...but there was no horse to be had, no horse. My own horse had died in the night, worn out by the fatigues of this icy winter; my servant girl was now running around the village trying to borrow a horse; but it was hopeless, I knew it, and I stood there forlornly, with the snow gathering more and more thickly upon me, more and more unable to move” (Kafka, 1993, p. 164). The first glimpse of the bizarre and the unreal occurs when suddenly after the doctor kicks at the door of the pigsty, a mysterious groom shows up with a team of horses. Having bitten Rose, the groom tells the doctor that he will not accompany the doctor, but will instead stay with Rose, who “shrieked, fleeing into the house with a justified presentiment that her fate was inescapable;...” (Kafka, 1993, p. 165). At that particular moment, the doctor seems to face a dilemma: he must hurry to help the patient or he must stay to protect Rose from the wicked groom. Manson (2005) noted that the doctor’s dilemma resembles what happened in Kafka’s life:

He was also struggling to choose between his responsibility to his fiancée, Felice Bauer,...and his vocation as a writer (as a chaste bachelor). The doctor's inability to choose between his duty to his patients and his responsibility (and desire) for Rose mirrors Kafka's rebellion against his father and his indecision about marriage. (p. 299)

The groom is able to gain control over the doctor: " 'Gee up!' he said; clapped his hands; the gig whirled off like a log in a freshet;..." (Kafka, 1993, p. 165). Before the doctor realizes what happens, he is disrupted by an unexpected storming rush that blurred his senses:

I could just hear the door of my house splitting and bursting as the groom charged at it and then I was deafened and blinded by a storming rush that steadily buffeted all my senses. (Kafka, 1993, p. 165)

The movement when the doctor journeys on a magnificent pair of horses from his house to the patient's farmyard is where Kafka merges the real world into a different world. The doctor's arrival is like his entering into the dream world: "The basic form of the story resembles the structure of a dream because there are, for example, no transitions from scene to scene or from one mode of existence to another" (Leiter, 1958, p. 339). What happens does not correspond with the laws of nature. That is, the doctor's standing in front of his courtyard represents the natural world. However, with the unexpected storming rush, he suddenly reaches the patient's farmyard. According to Marson and Leopold (1964), "A Country Doctor" presents no time and space: "... much of the irrational and dreamlike atmosphere of the story arises from the absence of temporal and spatial orientation. In the latent content of 'Ein Landarzt' the distance between the doctor and his patient is not a physical distance at all" (p. 158). The description of the place reveals the dreamlike state:

But this only for a moment, since, as if my patient's farmyard had opened out just before my courtyard gate, I was already there; the horses had come quietly to a standstill; the blizzard had stopped; moonlight all around; my patient's parents hurried out of the house, his sister behind them. (Kafka, 1993, p. 165)

“A Country Doctor” can be compared to a surrealist novel *Un Rêve plus long que la nuit* by Alain Jouffroy which deals with fantasy: “Equally noteworthy is its use of fancy or fantasy, the manner in which it treats the world of the real world as nothing other than a springboard, making possible a leap into the realm of the surreal” (Matthews, 1969, p. 158).

From the moment of arrival at the patient's house to the moment of departure, the doctor has to experience an illogical, irrational nightmarish world, the world of absurdity. His trip to the patient's house seems to be his own trip into the depth of his soul in which hidden guilt and despair are to be exposed. While the doctor is dwelling in the dream world, the reader can gain insight into the doctor's hidden feelings. In this sense, dreaming “becomes an instrument in Surrealism's revolt against the world of conventional” (Mathews, 1965, p. 64). Man's inner truth can be revealed in the dreamlike state, the region of the unconscious. Mabile as cited in Matthews (1965) notes that dream has the capacity to “ ‘cast light upon our true internal reality,’ and to ‘reveal new aspects of a wider external reality’ ” (p. 65).

Shortly after checking the boy who has no fever but desires to die, the doctor thinks of Rose for the first time: “And only now did I remember Rose again; what was I to do, how could I rescue her, how could I pull her away from under the groom at ten miles' distance, with a team of horses I couldn't control” (Kafka, 1993, p. 166). The doctor is torn between obligation to his duty and responsibility as Rose's master. Mason (2005) analyzes his desperate situation:

Kafka's physician faces a dilemma that is immediately familiar to modern readers: where is our primary duty? How can reason help us choose between following 'ideals' and our responsibilities for 'the dear ones at home'? Should the doctor choose professional duties or family responsibilities? The dilemma is set in intransigently absolute terms: the doctor must choose one or the other, there is no middle ground (p. 300).

Perceiving the family's great expectation about his treatment, the doctor is increasingly aware of his absurd condition. The parents may represent the society which puts pressure on him. What the doctor encounters corresponds to what Richardson (2016) notes about the world of Surrealism: "...it reminds us that we know nothing of why we are here or what purpose we are really supposed to serve. At the same time, it asserts that those purposes imposed upon us by society are false and to be opposed" (p. 207). The doctor's complaint about his situation reflects his state of mind:

I am no world reformer...I was the district doctor and did my duty to the uttermost, to the point where it became almost too much. I was badly paid and yet generous and helpful to the poor. I had still to see that Rose was all right, and then the boy might have his way and I wanted to die too. (Kafka, 1993, p. 167)

Kafka experiments with the absurdity of the human condition within the nightmarish situation. "A Country Doctor" is informed by visions of absurdity and the doctor is caught in the nightmare where he fails to act to change his condition. The story portrays the doctor as a bewildered being in an incomprehensible world. He journeys to an alien universe represented by the village and conceive the universe as having no value or meaning. He also feels isolated. There is no real communication and understanding between the people in the village and the doctor:

What was I doing there in that endless winter!... And I nodded to the family. They knew nothing about it, and, had they known, would not have believed it. To write prescriptions is easy, but to come to an understanding with people is hard. Well, this should be the end of my visit, I had once more been called out needlessly,... (Kafka, 1993, p. 167)

In hopelessness, the doctor realizes not only the fact that he has to sacrifice Rose for nothing, but also his absurd existence as a doctor:

...the whole district made my life a torment with my night bell, but that I should have to sacrifice Rose this time as well,... that sacrifice was too much to ask, and I had somehow to get it reasoned out in my head with the help of what craft I could muster in order not to let fly at this family, which with the best will in the world could not restore Rose to me. (Kafka, 1993, p. 167)

However, despite his serious complaints about his sacrifice and his responsibilities as a doctor, he is ironically depicted as an incapable person who could not even control the horses and allows the groom to dominate him. Manson (2005) discusses the doctor's incompetence: "Doctors have a special obligation to be disciplined in order to impart strength, courage, and hope to their patients. Yet how can the doctor impart strength, or courage, or hope if he lacks self-discipline? How can he perform his duty if he cannot control himself and his desires" (p. 301).

The way Kafka looks at his world has an impact on his fictions. Kafka as cited in McElroy (1985) describes his world in the letter he wrote to his father:

The world as for me divided into three parts: into one in which I, the slave, lived under laws that had been invented only for me and which I could, I did not know why, never completely comply with; then into a second world, which was infinitely remote from mine, in which you lived,...; and finally into a third world where everybody lived free from orders and from having to obey (p. 218).

The country doctor as an isolated victim is tormented by the conflict which causes him to plunge into deep despair. McElroy (1985) points out how Kafka's three-part world plays an important role in the depiction of his character: "One result of this division is to push to the extreme the conflict between self and other and to render it in terms of a totally isolated individual set upon by an omnipotent force that wills his destruction, the conflict being played out before the impersonal but intensely curious audience that regards that destruction as predictable and even reasonable outcome" (p. 219).

The doctor's situation becomes more bizarre and incongruous once he checks the boy again and finds a wound in his right side. Evidently, Kafka intensifies his protagonist's nightmare by means of the wound and the villagers' superstitious custom. Manson (2005) points out how the wound can be related to the sexual aspect: "Kafka expands the image of the wound with blatantly erotic language that compares it to a vagina" (p. 305). Kafka describes the wound: "Rose-red in many variations of shade, dark in the hollows, lighter at the edges, softly granulated, with irregular clots of blood, open as a surface mine in the daylight" (Kafka, 1993, p. 167). Evidently, the "rose-red wound" reminds the reader of Rose, the servant girl. And as he looks at the wound closely, he is surprised to see worms: "Worms, as thick and as long as my little finger, themselves rose-red and blood-spotted as well, were wriggling from their fastness in the interior of the wound toward the light, with small white heads and many little legs" (Kafka, 1993, p. 168). The phrase "rose-red" which is used twice probably discloses the doctor's guilt concerning Rose whom he leaves with the disgusting groom. Manson (2005) explains a sex-related aspect of the doctor's failure: "Kafka's description of the repulsive infestation of the wound/vagina suggests an aversion to physical intimacy; it also suggests that sex is another responsibility the doctor cannot perform, just as he is unable to perform his professional duty" (p. 305). Marson and Leopold (1964) explore the wound's aspect of psyche: "The worms in the wound represent the repressed and yet still very vital experiences that inhabit the unconscious and cause illness by emerging into consciousness, i.e. the upper part of the wound" (p. 154).

The doctor realizes that the boy is going to die and he cannot cure him. When the boy asks him to save his life, the frustrated doctor keeps complaining about his

miserable condition as the boy and his family apparently have high expectations for the doctor: "That is what people are like in my district. Always expecting the impossible from the doctor. They have lost their ancient beliefs; the parson sits at home and unravels his vestments, one after another. But the doctor is supposed to be omnipotent with his merciful surgeon's hand" (Kafka, 1993. p. 168). The doctor's reference to the parson can reveal his thought about the religious implication:

It is made quite explicit that the problem is not medical but religious. The boy, like the other inhabitants of the district, has lost his religious faith, and the man who could and should cure him sits at home engaged in endless theological hair-splitting. (Marson and Leopold, 1964, p. 154)

The sense of absurdity is intensified greatly when the parents and the village elders perform their superstitious custom by undressing the doctor and put him in the bed where the boy lies, expecting the miracle to take place. Again, the doctor fails to gain control over the existing situation: "Never, consciously, does he attempt through an overt act, until too late, to establish his own essence, to rise above any manipulative value he possesses for others. As doctor he is a thing, an object, a tool; as man he is nothing" (Leiter, 1958, p. 340). Evidently, in the manifest content of the dream, causality rarely exists. The family and the village elders stripped his clothes off and, as bizarre and incongruous as it is, the school choir mysteriously appears, singing a song with piercing lyrics:

Strip his clothes off, then he'll heal us,  
If he doesn't, kill him dead!  
Only a doctor, only a doctor. (Kafka, 1993, p. 168)

The illness in the story can be considered a metaphor for spiritual and moral decadence which as Manson (2005) explains "was an important theme in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature" (p.305). When the doctor is put on the patient's

bed, he becomes a patient himself who is spiritually and morally sick due to his weakness: "Apathetically, he does not recognize that the boy patient is a reflection of himself, ill physically as the doctor is morally because of his refusal to recognize his freedom to choose and to act in terms of it" (Leiter, 1958, p. 340). Marson and Leopold explain what it may mean when the doctor is undressed and is put on the boy's bed: "It is also possible that the episode was intended to suggest that the lay bystanders see in the doctor someone just as sick as the patient, and the doctor's acquiescence in being placed in the bed may suggest that he agrees with this view" (p. 155).

The conversation between the doctor and his patient reflects his despair of the clashes between his medical knowledge and the superstitious custom of the villagers who believe that the doctor is like a savior figure. The scene on the deathbed prolongs the doctor's suffering from desperation and loneliness:

'Do you know,' said a voice in my ear, 'I have very little confidence in you. Why, you were only blown in here,...Instead of helping me, you're cramping me on my deathbed. What I'd like best is to scratch your eyes out.' 'Right,' I said, 'it is a shame. And yet I am a doctor. What am I to do? Believe me it is not too easy for me either. (Kafka, 1993, p. 169)

The doctor gives some consolation before the boy's death: "I have been in all the sickrooms, far and wide, and I tell you: your wound is not so bad" (Kafka, 1993, p. 169). The doctor's lack of power and strength to gain control over the existing situations makes him an example of a protagonist who deserves to be manipulated, scorned, and undignified. Trapped in the hostile, nightmarish world and threatened by the children's song he finally seeks to escape by riding the horses back to his house. However, the horses, which on his way to the patient's farmyard galloped at incredible speed, galloped slowly: " 'Gee up!' I said, but there was no galloping; slowly, like old men, we crawled through the snowy wastes; a long time echoed behind us the new but faulty song of the children:..." (Kafka, 1993, p. 169). The song is a false hope because what actually happens is that the doctor fails to cure the patient and he dies:

O be joyful, all you patients,  
The doctor's laid in bed beside you! (Kafka, 1993, p. 169)

The doctor is well aware that his life will never be the same; the journey to the patient's farmyard has grave effects on him: "Naked and unable to reach his fur coat, he is a ridiculous figure, and yet, as an aged man exposed to the bitter cold, he is also an object of sympathy, even pity. And the worst of it is that it has all been in vain" (Marson and Leopold, 1964, p. 156). At the end of the story, the hopeless doctor falls into a state of dehumanization and alienation. Kafka precisely captures the utter absurdity of a bad dream which his protagonist has gone through. Gray et al. (2005) defines the absurd: "At the center of the absurd lies the idea that human existence is utterly without metaphysical purpose or rationality and out of harmony with the universe... Insight into the situation leaves the individual alienated and isolated,..." (p. 2). In travelling back to his house, the doctor declares his absurd condition:

Never shall I reach home at this rate; my flourishing practice is done for; my successor is robbing me, but in vain, for he cannot take my place; in my house the disgusting groom is raging; Rose is his victim; I do not want to think about it anymore. Naked, exposed to the frost of this most unhappy of ages, with an earthly vehicle, unearthly horses, old man that I am, I wander astray... Betrayed! A false alarm on the night bell once answered-it cannot be made good, not ever. (Kafka, 1993, pp. 169-170)

Truly, the doctor is the protagonist whose fate exemplifies Kafka's world which is "a universe of absurdity through which the human intelligence is groping, and in the end can lead only to despair" (Daniel-Rops, 1969, p. 21).

#### 4. Conclusion

In literature from the modern to the contemporary period, the surrealist concepts have become integral parts of the contemporary short story. The two bases of Surrealism which characterize the contemporary short stories are a dreamlike quality and absurdity. Franz Kafka, a remarkable representative of the contemporary short story, experiments with these two surrealist elements in "A Country Doctor." The journey from the doctor's courtyard to the patient's farm yard is like a miraculous journey from the waking world to the dream world where the doctor's hidden, subconscious truths are exposed. In the oppressive and nightmarish situation, commonly known as Kafkaesque, the doctor is tormented by failure, frustration, guilt, and hopelessness to the point where the absurdity of mankind is revealed. The absurd world that he experiences lacks congruity, consistency, and logic. The highest tension occurs when the doctor's clothes are stripped off. He finds himself naked and he feels betrayed. There is no value in life. The slow speed of the horses on the way back to his courtyard intensifies the absurdity of the situation which keeps torturing him.

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