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MOTIVES OF LONELINESS AND WANDERING IN F. KAFKA'S NOVELLA "A COUNTRY DOCTOR"

Problem Statement and Its Connection to Important Scientific or Practical Tasks. The doctor is a profession inextricably linked to human life. With the development of medicine and advancements in medical care in the 20th century, the image of the doctor has become a frequent fixture in various literary works, including German literature. To understand the specific manifestations and value of this image in literature, this article uses the image of the doctor in F. Kafka's "A Country Doctor" as an example, analyzing the doctor's image from the perspectives of wandering and loneliness. This article explores the doctor's existential dilemma and the tragic situation of homelessness, and, in light of F. Kafka's life experiences, examines the deeper meaning of the work, drawing parallels between them to better understand the significance of the doctor's image in German literature.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The literary legacy of F. Kafka represents one of the most significant phenomena of European modernism, combining philosophical depth, psychological insight, and symbolic richness. The study of motifs and images in his works remains highly relevant, as they reflect the crisis of humanistic values in the early twentieth century, the alienation of the individual within impersonal social systems, and the search for meaning in an absurd reality. In the postmodern era, when questions of identity, alienation, and the relationship between the individual and power regain urgency, F. Kafka's motifs acquire renewed interpretative significance. F. Kafka's "A Country Doctor" has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its dense symbolism, psychological complexity, and philosophical depth. Researchers have approached the story from diverse theoretical perspectives, including existentialist, psychoanalytic, symbolic, and adaptation studies frameworks. Collectively, these analyses reveal the multifaceted nature of F. Kafka's artistic vision and the interpretative openness of his prose.

In the article "Kafka's 'A Country Doctor': A Tale For Our Time", John Brancato interprets the story as a metaphor for the inadequacy of the scientific approach when confronted with nature, death, and the limits of human understanding. Brancato emphasizes the existential conflict between the doctor's professional role and the uncontrollable forces of life and circumstance, suggesting that scientific rationality collapses in the face of absurdity. These reading positions F. Kafka's text as a critique of modernity's overreliance on reason and empirical knowledge. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, several scholars have applied Freudian theory to explore the motifs of dreams, the unconscious, and repression – particularly of sexual and emotional nature. These interpretations focus on the doctor's experiences of helplessness, shame, and corporeality, especially in moments of exposure and vulnerability. Such readings interpret his inability to act or intervene as manifestations of repressed desire, fractured identity, and internal conflict, thereby situating the story within a broader psychological and symbolic discourse.

In "Metamorphosis as Origin – Koji Yamamura's Short Animation F. Kafka's A Country Doctor", the authors analyze the animated adaptation as a visual reinterpretation of F. Kafka's motifs.

The study highlights how transformations of form – both physical and psychological – reinforce the themes of alienation and the loss of control, illustrating the fluid boundaries between the inner and outer worlds of the protagonist. This perspective underscores the adaptability of F. Kafka's narrative to different media while preserving its existential resonance.

Hans P. Guth, in his article “*Symbol and Contextual Restraint: Kafka's 'Country Doctor'*”, offers a critical reflection on the excesses of purely symbolic readings. Guth argues that many interpretations extend beyond the textual evidence, neglecting linguistic and stylistic nuances. His analysis stresses the need for contextual restraint” in symbol-based criticism and shows how environmental elements – such as snow, harsh weather, and nocturnal settings – restrict the protagonist both psychologically and physically.

Finally, the study “*Anguish and Nothingness in Kafka's 'A Country Doctor' and 'The Starvation Artist'*” explores how F. Kafka employs the motifs of *anguish* and *nothingness* as core existential dimensions of his work. By linking these motifs to the broader philosophical discourse of existentialism, the article illuminates how F. Kafka's fiction portrays the human condition as one of perpetual anxiety and metaphysical isolation.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the interpretative richness of “*A Country Doctor*”. Whether approached through existentialist, psychoanalytic, or semiotic frameworks, the story continues to reveal new layers of meaning that reflect F. Kafka's exploration of alienation, absurdity, and the fragile boundaries of human experience.

The purpose of the research is to identify and analyze the key motifs in F. Kafka's short story “*A Country Doctor*”, particularly the motifs of helplessness, guilt, absurdity, and alienation, and to determine their role in constructing the author's artistic model of the world. The study employs structural-semiotic, comparative-typological, and hermeneutic methods, which make it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of F. Kafka's artistic system and to reveal the polysemantic nature of his symbolism. The novelty of the research lies in the attempt to provide a holistic interpretation of the system of motifs and images in Franz F. Kafka's works as a universal model of modernist worldview, integrating philosophical, existential, and cultural dimensions.

Presentation of the Main Research Material Archetypes. F. Kafka was an Austrian writer and a pioneer of Western Modernist literature. His literary output focused on the early 20th century, a time when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was on the verge of collapse. The bloated bureaucracy left the people feeling lost and helpless, and absurdities abounded in daily life. F. Kafka's stories are characterized by illogical and non-linear plots, uncertain time and place, and allegorical characters, often shrouded in despair and tragedy. His writing is delicate, imbued with subtle humor and irony.

“*A Country Doctor*” is a short story by F. Kafka, written between December 14, 1916, and mid-January of the following year. “It was first published in the 1918 edition of the yearbook *Die neue Dichtung* (New Literature) and included in the collection of stories of the same name, ‘*A Country Doctor*’, the following year. F. Kafka only mentioned ‘*A Country Doctor*’ when he described his works as satisfying indicating the importance of this story in his oeuvre” (Zhao, 2012, p. 118).

The short story “*A Country Doctor*” is a modernist novel imbued with a sense of absurdity, fully showcasing the protagonist's dilemma, a common existential dilemma faced by humanity in the first half of the XXth century. This existential dilemma manifests itself in two dimensions: wandering and loneliness.

“*A Country Doctor*” recounts the experiences of a rural doctor on a nighttime visit. This journey, comprised of a series of stories spanning the visit, the patient's diagnosis, and the aftermath, forms a dreamlike journey. Throughout this journey, the doctor struggles with one predicament after another. Ultimately, his dream of saving lives is shattered. Abandoned, naked, and riding an otherworldly horse, he embarks on an eternal journey of wandering through the freezing snow. The following text

will explore the doctor's precarious life and real-life circumstances as reflected in the novel, analyzing the deeper meaning of wandering.

The story opens with the words, "I am in a great dilemma" (Kafka, 2016, p. 94) highlighting the realities of a country doctor's predicament: he needs to travel to a village ten miles away to visit a critically ill patient. A fierce snowstorm has blocked the road, and he has only a carriage but no horse, which died of exhaustion on a freezing winter night. His maid, Rosa, scurries around the village, hoping to borrow a horse for him, but no one is willing to lend her one for the errand. Frustrated, the doctor kicks open the broken door of the pigsty, and a miracle occurs: a groom and two sturdy horses appear. The appearance of the horses and the coachman resolves the doctor's predicament, his desire to see a patient but his inability to do so. However, a second dilemma soon arises: the coachman's intentions towards Rosa, the maid, leave the doctor in a dilemma: protect Rosa or continue his treatment. The doctor is furious, but he dares not offend the coachman, as his presence has helped him escape his predicament. The doctor asks the coachman to accompany him on the visit, but the coachman insists he stays with Rosa. The doctor wanted to prevent the bad thing from happening by not seeing patients, but the carriage sped away with the doctor under the coachman's shouts.

The carriage arrived at the patient's courtyard in a flash. His parents and sister hurried out to greet him. The patient was a young, thin man with lifeless eyes. He threw his arms around the doctor's neck and whispered in his ear: "Doctor, let me die" (Kafka, 2016, p. 197). After examining him, the doctor confirmed: "The boy is healthy, just suffering from a slight blood deficiency. His worried mother gave him too much coffee. But he's actually healthy. The best thing to do now is to get him out of bed" (Kafka, 2016, p. 198). Meanwhile, the patient's parents and sister, standing nearby, expressed deep disappointment, as if expecting the doctor to declare the boy seriously ill.

Just then, two horses neighed outside the window, seemingly giving the doctor a revelation, prompting him to reexamine the patient. This time, the doctor actually discovered the patient's fatal wound. He found a palm-sized wound, deep within which crawled tiny insects. The patient was beyond saving. Faced with the family's reaction, the doctor lost patience and refused to cooperate with their treatment. He realized he was playing the role of a pastor, not to heal the wounded but to provide peace of mind for the family. Then, the family and the village elders joined forces, forcibly stripping the doctor of his clothes and forcing him down onto the narrow bed, forcing him to face the patient's wounds. The patient, filled with resentment, complained: "I lacked trust in you. You were simply abandoned somewhere, unable to save yourself. Instead of helping me, you've made my bed even smaller. I wish I could gouge your eyes out" (Kafka, 2016, p. 201).

After doing his best to comfort the patient, the doctor attempted to save himself. He quickly gathered his clothes and medical bag and leaped onto his horse, but the horse didn't gallop. Instead, it slowly, like an old man, drove across the snowy plains. The elderly and frail doctor sat alone in the carriage, amid the jeers of passersby, slowly heading towards the unknown in an absurd and uncontrollable situation: In the harsh winter of this most unfortunate time: "I, an old man, naked, sit in a human carriage, driving a horse that is not human, rushing around, suffering from the bitter cold" (Kafka, 2016, p. 203). This is a heartbreaking desolation, helplessness, and sadness. The doctor didn't know the direction of the carriage, nor did he know when he would return home. After escaping one predicament, he fell into another.

The novel comprehensively depicts the four dilemmas encountered by the rural doctor I" in the process of treating a sick teenager, from beginning to end. These four dilemmas constitute the core content of the story.

The novel's ending is filled with metaphorical meaning. The naked doctor wanders alone in the harsh winter wilderness, helpless and with nowhere to escape. Surrounded by absurdity, pain, and loneliness, he longs for understanding and salvation, but no one is willing to lend a hand. Worst of all, he will wander forever, unable to return home. Combining F. Kafka's life experiences and the

social environment he lived in, it's reasonable to assume that the rural doctor is F. Kafka himself, and the dilemma he faces is also F. Kafka's. The deeper meaning of wandering in the novel reflects the author's own life experiences.

As a writer of exquisite sensitivity and insight, F. Kafka observed and understood society and the human condition more profoundly than most, more acutely capturing the universal plight of human existence: anxiety, panic, and loneliness. He struggles mightily, yet is powerless to escape this spiritual predicament, ultimately condemning the protagonist of his novel to a state of eternal wandering.

As one researcher put it, he felt powerless in life. His marriage, career, and interpersonal relationships had all failed, and his final attempt at literature was also futile. Overwhelmed by this double sense of failure, he lingered on a feeling of worthlessness and lack of a place in the world. On September 18, 1920, he wrote to his girlfriend, Milena: "There is no real ground beneath me... I have no idea how high above the earth I am floating. On July 5, 1922, he wrote to Brod, I have once again realized how fragile, even nonexistent, the land I live on is. The rural doctor's wandering fate undoubtedly reflects this sense of groundlessness" (Zhou, 2010, p. 101).

During F. Kafka's lifetime, the capitalist world was mired in crisis, and the West was shrouded in a gloomy sense of uncertainty about its future. He lived under the absolutist rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the impact of modern European trends, under the patriarchal authority of his father. Furthermore, F. Kafka's Jewish ancestry, long without a stable homeland, imprinted in him a sense of Jewish homelessness. "As described in 'The Life of Franz Kafka' 'This truly extraordinary journey' was also a 'departure' toward an uncertain future. F. Kafka imagined his escape from Prague, dreaming of this very 'departure'. The country doctor was ultimately forced into this endless, lifelong journey. He could not escape its laws. His fate mirrored that of the eternally wandering Jew, Akhsevi, a fate told in medieval legend" (Peter-Andre Art, 2011, p. 497).

"A Country Doctor" with its absurd and mysterious themes and content fraught with uncertainty, vividly demonstrates the irrationality of society and the loneliness of one's own existence. The doctor in the work is lonely, as are the patients, and the other characters are also isolated and alienated from one another. This deep-seated loneliness reflects the loss of faith and the emptiness of the spiritual world.

The novel's protagonist, the doctor, is lonely. He has been loyal to his duties and willing to help others throughout his life, yet his salary is meager and his workload is heavy. He often braves freezing nights to make patient calls, suffering immensely, yet he lacks the trust of others. When his horse dies of exhaustion, he cannot borrow another in the village. Even his maid is abused by the horseman, leaving him without even the most basic safety. A patient is terminally ill, and the doctor desperately tries to save the patient, only to be stripped naked, forced onto the patient's bed, and subjected to humiliation. He attempts to escape in a carriage, but the horse refuses to cooperate, leaving him naked and alone wandering the wilderness. The patient's family shows no respect for the doctor who treats and saves lives, and he is subjected to brutal and inhumane treatment. All of this reflects the alienation and disconnection between people, the selfishness and depravity of human nature, and the powerlessness and absurdity of life.

The patients in the novel are lonely. Upon seeing the doctor, the sick young man throws his arms around his neck and whispers in his ear, "Doctor, let me die" (Kafka, 2016, p. 197). But the people around him chatter incessantly, paying no attention. The patient's parents stand hunched over, fulfilling their duty as a family member. When the doctor finds the patient is not ill, the family is deeply disappointed. But when he discovers the young man has an incurable disease, they breathe a sigh of relief, as if the patient's serious illness has fulfilled their wishes. There is no communication between doctor, patient, and family; each is immersed in their own inner world. All this reflects the existential dilemma, loneliness, and absurdity of modern life.

These seemingly absurd plots and scenes suggest a lack of trust between people, leading to a lack of communication. "A sense of strangeness and alienation leads people into loneliness and suffering.

This reveals the external forces that hold individuals hostage, and the powerlessness and resignation of the human condition to their circumstances. From the suffocating air, forced into embarrassment, to desperate escape, one cannot escape the pervasive loneliness, visible or invisible” (Zeng, 2006, p. 122).

“A Country Doctor” became F. Kafka’s most cherished work because of the boundless charm hidden within its dreamlike plot. Within its seemingly absurd settings, “one can glimpse familiar scenes of life and experience the common existential dilemma of modern humanity: in this seemingly bustling world, each person exists alone, in their own closed world, desolate and homeless, as if trapped in a quagmire, unable to extricate themselves, unable to escape” (Li Li, 2018, p. 133).

This novel, rich in symbolism, is short yet rich in thought. But its primary expression is a sense of loneliness and alienation that transcends reason. This loneliness stems from the loss of faith and the emptiness of the spiritual world in modern society, and it also reflects the writer F. Kafka’s inner world.

In the novel, a patient asks the village doctor, “Will you save me?” (Kafka, 2016, p. 200). This question, in fact, is more about the salvation of the soul. Can the doctor do it? The answer is no. The doctor says, “That’s how people here are. We always ask doctors for the impossible. We’ve lost our old faith. Priests sit idle at home, tearing their vestments one by one, while we ask doctors to restore life and save everything” (Kafka, 2016, p. 200). This statement captures the novel’s core idea: people cannot be saved because they have lost their faith. The patient says, “I came into this world with a beautiful wound; it’s my entire dowry” (Kafka, 2016, p. 201). Clearly, the patient’s wound symbolizes not only death but also original sin.

The rapid development of industrial civilization led Westerners to become obsessed with material pursuits and indulgences, alienating them from faith. However, the outbreak of World War I cast a significant shadow of industrial civilization. The collapse of faith left modern people spiritually destitute, leading them to blindly worship technology. For example, in the work, the doctor, a representative of modern technology, is temporarily deified, cast as a savior and expected to heal the sick. However, this worship, unlike traditional spiritual beliefs, is crude and utilitarian, destined to be unsustainable and unable to address the spiritual predicament of modern people. “Modern medicine is one of the hallmarks of scientific and technological progress, but the rural doctor’s sense of powerlessness demonstrates the inability of reason to save the soul. His doubts about the meaning of his own life suggest the shattering of the rational social order of the Western world” (Wang, 2016, p. 132). Consequently, people feel that life is filled with absurdity, “a constant and unending sense of powerlessness, as if trapped in a quagmire, unable to extricate themselves or escape” (Li, 2018, p. 133).

This feeling of loneliness and homelessness is inseparable from F. Kafka’s life experiences. “German literary critic Gunther Anderl commented on F. Kafka: As a Jew, he was not one of the Christians. As a non-conformist Jew, he was not one of the Jews. As a German speaker, he was not entirely Austrian. As an employee of a labor insurance company, he was not entirely bourgeois. As the son of a bourgeois, he was not entirely a worker, for he devoted his energy to his family. And “in my own family, I am more of a stranger than a stranger” (Ye, 1996, p. 1183). This awkward identity left F. Kafka unable to find his place in the real world, and the characters in his works are also lonely and helpless. It is not difficult to find that F. Kafka’s protagonists, without exception, encounter irreparable setbacks in life, some even paying the price with their lives. Their failures are F. Kafka’s affirmation of the unreliable nature of life’s experiences. “This emphasis on the ‘uncertainty’ of life undoubtedly reveals F. Kafka’s experience and reflections on modern life” (Zhang, 2020, p. 10).

Conclusions of this study and prospects for further research in this direction. It can be seen that in “A Country Doctor”, we see the image of a detached doctor, and outside of “A Country Doctor” we see F. Kafka’s lonely heart. This is not only a personal portrait of F. Kafka, but also a portrait of all human beings living in modern society. In short, the figure of the doctor, as a character in literary

works, has greatly enriched the content of literary writing. This was particularly true in the 20th century, as medicine modernized and literature modernized. The figure of the doctor in literary works can be seen as a metaphorical value, symbolic meaning, and a lens through which to perceive the sentiments of society. F. Kafka's "A Country Doctor", through the absurd plot of the protagonist, a country doctor, forced to flee on a cold winter night and left alone and helpless in the wilderness, serves as a metaphor for the existential predicament facing humanity in the first half of the XXth century. Here, the figure of the doctor serves as a symbolic and metaphorical signifier, reflecting F. Kafka's reflections on the modern human condition and his exploration of literary modernity. The study of F. Kafka's "A Country Doctor" remains an open and dynamic field, offering multiple perspectives for further exploration. Although numerous interpretations have addressed the story's existential, psychoanalytic, and symbolic dimensions, new approaches continue to emerge through developments in literary theory, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary research. Future studies may focus on the intermedial and intertextual aspects of the story, examining how "A Country Doctor" interacts with visual arts, film, and performance adaptations. Such analyses can shed light on how F. Kafka's motifs of alienation, helplessness, and absurdity are transformed across media and cultural contexts. Another promising direction involves the application of cognitive literary studies and narratology to explore how F. Kafka's fragmented narrative structure reflects the mental and emotional disintegration of the protagonist. Similarly, ecocritical readings could reinterpret the oppressive environment – the cold, snow, and night – not only as symbolic elements but also as reflections of humanity's fragile relationship with the natural world. Moreover, comparative studies may deepen our understanding of "A Country Doctor" by situating it alongside other modernist or existential works, such as those by Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, or Robert Musil. This would allow scholars to trace common patterns of absurdity, estrangement, and the limits of rational thought in early twentieth-century European literature. Finally, a renewed focus on the linguistic and stylistic features of the text – its rhythm, repetitions, and syntactic ambiguity – can provide valuable insights into how F. Kafka's language itself constructs the sense of disorientation and crisis that defines his narrative world. In sum, the continuing study of "A Country Doctor" promises to enrich not only F. Kafka scholarship but also broader discussions of modernity, identity, and the existential condition of humanity.

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Чжан Цзяці. Мотиви самотності та блукання в новелі Кафки «Сільський лікар»

У статті акцентовано, що новела Франца Кафки «Сільський лікар» є одним із символічно насичених творів європейської літератури початку ХХ століття. Цей твір пропонує читачеві глибокий аналіз людського екзистенційного досвіду. У статті досліджуються мотиви самотності та блукання в новелі німецького митця. Зокрема, автор аналізує репрезентацію психологічного стану головного героя та провідних філософських проблем модерністської літератури. Через детальний аналіз тексту акцентовано, що фізичні й емоційні переміщення лікаря виступають проявами відчуження, безсилля та невідвратної напруги між індивідуальною свободою і зовнішніми обставинами. Також досліджується взаємодія просторових і часових елементів: гнітючого зимового пейзажу, ізольованого села та неоднозначного розвитку подій. Ці складові розкривають і мотиви чужості та невизначеності. Спираючись на екзистенційні та психоаналітичні підходи, стаття розкриває символічні та психологічні виміри переживань лікаря. Підкреслено взаємозв'язок зовнішніх обмежень і внутрішніх криз. Мотиви блукання та самотності розглядаються не лише як нарративні прийоми, а як ключові елементи художньої стратегії Ф. Кафки, що виявляють межі людського розуміння та контролю в абсурдному й байдужому світі. Крім того, мотиви осмислюються в контексті творчості Ф. Кафки та модерністської традиції, демонструючи їхню співзвучність із повторюваними проблемами ідентичності, відчуження та конфлікту індивіда із соціумом. Дослідження робить внесок у наукову літературу про Ф. Кафку, пропонуючи глибоку інтерпретацію ключових мотивів у творі «Сільський лікар», а також відкриває нові перспективи для міждисциплінарних досліджень у сфері модерністської літератури та психології відчуження.

Ключові слова: Франц Кафка, «Сільський лікар», самотність, блукання, модерністська література.

Zhang Jiaqi. Motives of loneliness and wandering in F. Kafka's novella "A Country Doctor"

Franz Kafka's novella "*A Country Doctor*" remains one of the most enigmatic and symbolically rich works of early twentieth-century literature, offering a profound exploration of human existential experience. This article investigates the motives of loneliness and wandering in the narrative, emphasizing how they reflect the protagonist's psychological state and the broader philosophical concerns of modernist literature. Through a detailed analysis of the text, the study demonstrates that the doctor's physical and emotional displacements serve as manifestations of alienation, helplessness, and the inescapable tension between individual agency and external circumstances. The research also examines how the interplay of spatial and temporal elements – the oppressive winter landscape, the isolating village, and the ambiguous progression of events – contributes to the thematic construction of estrangement and uncertainty.

Drawing on existentialist and psychoanalytic perspectives, the article explores the symbolic and psychological dimensions of the doctor's experiences, highlighting the interrelation between external pressures and internal crises. The motifs of wandering and solitude are considered not merely as narrative devices but as essential components of F. Kafka's aesthetic strategy, revealing the limits of human understanding and control in an absurd and indifferent world. Furthermore, the study contextualizes these motifs within F. Kafka's broader literary corpus and the modernist tradition, showing how they resonate with recurring concerns about identity, alienation, and the tension between the individual and society.

This analysis contributes to F. Kafka scholarship by offering a nuanced interpretation of central motifs in "*A Country Doctor*", providing insights into the narrative techniques, symbolic imagery, and existential concerns that define the novella, while opening avenues for further interdisciplinary research on modernist literature and the psychology of alienation.

Key words: Franz Kafka, "*A Country Doctor*", loneliness, wandering, modernist literature.

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