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Professor Eric Miller COLT 28: Mind Reading

**Paper 3: A Country Doctor**

The horses. Try to make sense of the horses, any way you can.

A Country Doctor is a short story by Franz Kafka that fully encapsulates the idea of Kafkaesque. The story follows a doctor on a nightly visit to a dying patient during a winter storm. One of the numerous strange events in the story is the emergence of two horses from an abandoned pigsty. The emergence of these horses is peculiar because the doctor is unaware of their presence in a sty he owns and has not used in over a year. Apart from serving as a means of transportation for the doctor to go from his own home to his patients, the horses also serve as a mode of transport for the readers to examine the doctor’s outlook on himself and his work.

The emergence of strong and healthy horses out of nowhere when the doctor has to leave shows us that the doctor is overly zealous about his job at the cost of the well-being of those around him. Some hints Kafka offers of this are that his previous horse had died of overexertion, he does not recall the name of the servant girl who lives with him, and the fact that he is unaware of a stranger living in his sty with two fully grown horses. His primary concern is to get to his patient’s house. Although this concern and passion for his profession is understandable because the narrator is a doctor, his unawareness of anything else in his life is questionable.

An interesting question that Kafka prompts the reader to ask is why the doctor cares so deeply about his profession. The shift in the doctor’s perspective can lead one to assume that the doctor cares about his profession because it allows him to feel good about himself. The doctor is optimistic at the start of the story, reflected in his willingness to go to great lengths to be able to commute to his patient in the middle of a winter storm. The doctor’s opinion of himself is raised when carrying out his profession because of his exposure to the sick and dying, which contrasts with his health. Towards the end of the novel, however, after the doctor has performed his duties and is heading back home to be with Rosa and the groom(who could symbolize the doctor’s libido), we see the doctor become more pessimistic and less enthusiastic about both his life and his profession. He says, “I want to die too,” and “Naked, abandoned to the frost of this unhappy age, with an earthly carriage and unearthly horses, I drive around by myself, an old man.” The above quotations show the doctor now viewing his faults, primarily his age, as he returns home to people younger than himself. Since the doctor is no longer privileged in health and lacks something to be grateful for, his views tend to become negative compared to his earlier outlook on himself and his work. The word choice for the doctor when describing the inability of others to help him also highlights the doctor’s negative sentiment. He says, “Betrayed! Betrayed! Once one responds to a false alarm on the night bell, there’s no making it good again—not ever.” The same profession that the doctor commits wholeheartedly to is now the cause of so much unhappiness for the doctor.

The horses are an effective means of transportation by taking the reader on an eccentric journey to a dying man’s house with the doctor’s psychology. The same horses that transported the narrator instantaneously at the start of the story seem to be moving at a grudgingly slow pace during the doctor’s journey back home. He says, “I’ll never come home at this rate.” When comparing this change in outlook of the journey, which could not have gotten longer or shorter, to the modern saying, ‘Time flies when you’re having fun,’ we can conclude that the doctor’s mentality has changed. The doctor perceives time is moving more quickly at the beginning and slowly at the end of the story because of the change in his mentality.

In conclusion, the horses help the readers make sense of Kafkaesque events in the story by making us examine the psychology of the doctor. This analysis prompts the reader to question our mindsets and outlooks to better understand the world around us, how we respond/influence our surroundings, and the diverse range of societal influences on us.

Work Cited

Kafka, Franz. *A Country Doctor*. Kafka-Online. *Kafka Online*, https://www.kafka-online.info/a-country-doctor.html. Accessed 16 February 2024.