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**Use of Fantasy in J.M. Coetzee's *The Heart of the Country*: A Critical Study**

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Fantasy as an independent genre is a recent invention. It was considered an inferior part of science fiction literature for a long time. Fantasy can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art as a perennial literary mode. Thus, it can be said that fantasy was a part of other genre in the earlier time and later on it became an independent genre. The tradition of epic fantasy came with chivalric novel. The true beginnings of the fantasy genre can be traced to the nineteenth century, according to Carter, where it appeared as a reaction to the industrialization of society. The present paper is an analysis of Coetzee's novel, *The Heart of the Country* to observe how he has used fantasy in his novels.

**Key Words: Fantasy, Genre, Reality, Fiction**

### Introduction

Throughout human history, stories about magic, other worlds, time travel and transformation can be found in all languages and literature of all nations. The Phenomena that are unnatural, supernatural, and impossible never fail to captivate human beings. Individuals choose to read fantasy fiction because of their desire to transcend the boundaries of ordinary experience. People find enjoyment in hearing, reading, and writing stories about the impossible, the strange, and the mysterious from ancient myths to modern fantasy. The themes containing the elements of fantasy surround us on television, in fiction, in video games, and even on stage.

The act of fantasy reading requires the use of the imagination. Fantasy is the exploration of the fantastic as the name suggests. It is not the study of what can happen, but what might happen to the writer (and reader) imagines. The interplay between writer and reader in fantasy is even more important in this sense than in other literature. Since the role of the imagination is so important, as they read fantasy, the readers have much to contribute. The writer provides the substance, plot, characters, setting and much more, but whatever the text allows, the readers add with their imagination.



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## Use of Fantasy in Coetzee's Novels

People's daily lives are an unbearable way of dealing freely with the external world. Individuals have to confront and interact with each other in this world. They turn to their own fantastic inner world if this interaction fails to allow them to be what they want to be. In this way, a number of characters in Coetzee's fiction in general and In *The Heart of the Country* in particular withdraw into a world of fantasy to fail in the pursuit of happiness by establishing relationships with others. Life's reality denies them the pleasures they seek from life, and so they create their own fantasy worlds.

The novel is about South Africa In the Heart of the Country. Not surprisingly, that's why it's a race book. It is also a fantasy novel in which the character of Magda, the protagonist, is in fact Coetzee's creation of an imaginary being, sketched through her unconscious conflicts and fantasies, and her compulsive monologue develops through a free association of ideas, analysis and interpretation of dreams and sexual instinct repression.

Magda, a spinster of lonely jealousy and the daughter of a sheep farmer, is after revenge because her father has already found sexual satisfaction in the arms of the black bride of the foreman. The protagonist is tormented by this consciousness and becomes an isolated figure. She is haunted by it, gradually drawn into her own consciousness. This truth lies in her diary, where she goes through long and tedious entries. Her mother died when she was a child, and she obviously doesn't have any living brothers or sisters. She claims to be acquainted with none of her neighbours, never appears to visit the nearest village, and has no human companions except Hendrik, the black assistant to her father, and Anna, his young wife. She becomes murderously jealous of her obvious desire for attachment to other women, because her only human bond is with her father. The chief stimulus for the series of fantasies that constitute the bulk of her monologue is her fury at him. Her fantasies begin dramatically with her father's murder and continue with her painfully



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unsuccessful attempt to find Hendrik and Anna's companionship and love. "Magda speculates that many "melancholy spinsters, like me lost to history," are scattered around the country. (IHC, P.3) Her self-examining mind leads her to solipsism. What Magda records is everywhere marked by signs of doubt, erasure, denial and speculation. The opening section begins:

Today my father brought home his new bride. They came clip-clop across the flats in a dog-cart drawn by a horse with an ostrich-plume waving on its forehead, dusty after the long haul. Or perhaps they were drawn by (two plumed donkeys, that is also possible.). I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines. (In the Heart 1)

Magda presents her father's new bride to the readers, declaring that her mother had died in childbirth. However, as noted, she later casts some doubts about the circumstances of the death of the woman, claiming to have been looked after by the woman before she died and after denying the existence of a step mother, she repeats the description of that illusory first arrival a few pages later by stating 'He has not brought a new wife home' (16), admitting that the two individuals arriving at the farm

Coetzee exposes the boundaries of the structures of the settler colonialism of South Africa and the legacy of apartheid. Magda also rejects colonialism and its injustices, following Coetzee. As such, there are no real events that take place in the novel. An act of consciousness and language is what takes place in the novel. Later, Magda immediately admits that perhaps two donkeys drew the dogcart, before finally admitting with supreme indifference to the truth of the matter that, in any event, she was not watching at the time. She conjures up several possibilities, even as to what activity she was engaged in on that occasion, before reverting to her original assertion that she was, after all, watching.

Magda has a variety of dreams and one leads to another. As she imagines the sex of the married



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couple and also her pregnancy, she thinks she is carrying a child who would lead and be shot down with the 'colored' individuals in rebellion. In the form of imagination, the things she can never achieve in real life find wind through her repressed desires. She carries over the childhood rape fantasy to such an extent that her relationship seems to be an incestuous one, whereas it is not, in reality.

The sexual fantasy between Magda's father and the new bride leads to jealousy, and she thinks she's going to kill her father. Because until her middle age she never experienced a sexual life, and so, her jealousy is due to the Oedipus Complex. Freudian psychoanalysis theory works over here. The sexual desire of the female infant to remove the mother and become the father's partner is therefore the agency for the production of the female-male distinction. The mother is loved and hated; she represents repressiveness, privilege, power, potency, the government or the state, religion, the establishment, the education system, languages and literature etc. On the other hand, the father is wanted but resented. In the following lines, Magda's efforts to kill her father with an axe are described here, but her attempt may be just in her thoughts.

I am not bringing the meat-cleaver, as I thought it would be, but the hatchet, the Valkyries' weapon. Like a true lover of poetry, breathing with their breath, I deepen myself in the stillness. My father is lying naked on his back, the fingers of his right hand twisted to his left. .... The axe is gliding over my shoulder. This is what all kinds of people did before me, wives, sons, lovers, heirs, rivals, I'm not alone. Like a ball on a string, it floats down at the end of my arm, sinks into the throat below me, and all is suddenly tumult. In bed, the woman snaps upright, glaring at her, drenched in blood. (In the Heart 11)

Although Coetzee portrays Magda's attempts to murder her father, the remaining part of the novel finds him alive. It merely reveals her strong desire to wipe away her father's image so that she can live a



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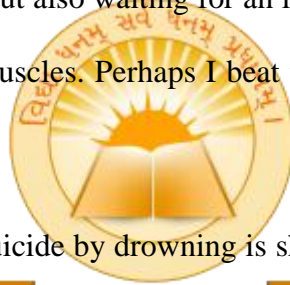
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pleasant life. This is not happening, however. And instead, she asks herself why she has not made friends with her deviant act, and how she will dispose of her father's body. Inside the fictional world, there are questions, conjectures and uncertainties throughout the narrative. Only the imaginary tale of the protagonist is a major part of the narrative. Remembering her childhood, she wondered, maybe there were step brothers, maybe that explains it all, maybe that's the truth, it definitely has more of the ring of truth. The term "maybe" reflects the uncertainty of events.

Of all adventures suicide is the most literary, more so even than murder...Perhaps I strike out once or twice with wooden arm. Perhaps I sink a second time, tasting the water with less revulsion now. Perhaps I come to the surface again, still thrashing, but also waiting for an interlude of stillness to test and taste the languor of my muscles. Perhaps I beat the water now in one spot only. (In the Heart 13)



Magda's fantasy of unsuccessful suicide by drowning is shown in the above lines. Though she seems never to have seen the sea, she makes use of sea imagery and that of underground waters, when she considers suicide and imagines herself diving into an underground river. The remoteness of the image from her actual life may be what makes her see it, finally, as inappropriate to her

In the absence of known or remembered data, the extravagant imagination of Magda churns out is ritually prefaced by 'perhaps'-a kind of linguistic trademark advertising Magda's narrative modality. As she acknowledges correctly herself, "I clearly make up for what I lack in experience in vision" (42). Although she is quite unable to remember the events of a specific day, she comes up with a series of five maybe before acknowledging "There are, however, other ways in which I could have spent the day and which I cannot ignore" (80), a statement directly followed by a further sequence of five.



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The phantasies of action of Magda tend to be dreams of rebellion against the patriarchal and racist convention of rural Afrikaans life. Her fantasies have three primary focus areas: herself, her father and the farm workers, Hendrik and Klein Anna. Jakob and Ou-Anna, two other servants, are less important and are imagined to be sent away by Magda's father. The novel focuses a great deal on the two servants, Hendrik and Klein Anna.

She remembers the return of Hendrik to the farm with his bride six months earlier. Hendrik brought his new bride home six months ago." (IHC, p.17) Hendrik, the farm worker, brings his new wife home in a donkey cart, having bought her from her father for six goats and a five-pound note, with a promise of five more pounds, or maybe five more goats, one doesn't always hear these things well." The coming of Hendrik's marital home seems to deny the opening scene of the father bringing Magda's stepmother home. If this passage is compared to the opening paragraph of the novel, an uncanny sense of sameness and difference is obtained. We realise that Magda has a narrative scheme ready to describe the new couple riding in a cart, then describe the man in terms of his clothes, and finally describe the woman, noting the verbal parallels. The literaryness of these moments is thus brought out by Coetzee: this is not how things really happen, but how Magda starts a storey. Here, from the distinct impression the narrator uses in making up the storey according to literary patterns<sup>9</sup> that have become habitual to her, Coetzee draws attention to the act of fabulation.

She observes the way Hendrik's ancestors got married in her fantasy world. A husband had two wives in the earlier days when patriarchy existed, whereas now Hendrik has only one wife and old Jacob, and the farm worker has only one wife.

In the old day, the bygone days ..... when 'Hendrik' was a patriarch bowing his knee to no one, he took to bed two wives who revered him, did his will,





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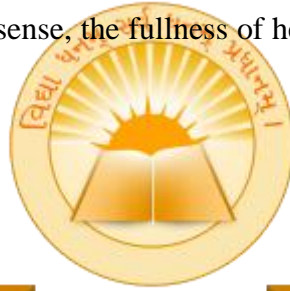
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adapted their bodies to his desires, slept tight against him, the old wife on one side, the young wife on the other, that is how I imagine it. (In the Heart 17)

Also, Magda imagines the village that Hendrik brought his wife from. The beautiful scenery of the impoverished settlement of Armoede is provided by Magda, where the servant Hendrik goes to get his bride.

The name of the place 'Armoede' is too perfect, too allegorical, corresponding to the name and the scene. Hendrik comes from the nearby township of Armoede, according to Magda's Utopia, which Magda has never seen but can invent; having described the familiar social geography of poverty, Magda then says that what keeps her going is her determination to go beyond the "names, names, names" that separate her from this world, "to burst through the screen of names into Armoede's goats eye view." In fact, everything that seems real to her is imagined; in that sense, the fullness of her life is an illusion and, therefore, a sort of emptiness.



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### Conclusion

It can be said that the fantasy in the novel is her inner voice that she has never experienced but wants to happen in real life. Magda is found in the above lines to be in her room and the servants in their bedroom, discussing the lack of sex for Magda. Throughout the novel, this pattern of proposing an account and then immediately calling its validity into question is repeated over and over again, making it impossible for us to ignore the truth to which such narrative behaviour emphatically points, namely that the narrator is unable to differentiate between reality and fantasy, chronicle and fabulation.

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