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

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ABSTRACT

It was only recently that fantasy emerged as a distinct genre. It was viewed as a subpar component of science fiction writing for a very long period. Fantasy's long literary history may be linked to ancient mythology, stories, folklore, and carnival art. Thus, it may be claimed that fantasy once belonged to another genre before evolving into its own. With the advent of chivalric novels, epic fantasy became a tradition. According to Carter, the fantasy genre's genuine origins may be found in the nineteenth century, when it first developed in response to society's industrialization. This essay examines Coetzee's book *The Heart of the Country* to see how he employs imagination in his works.

Key Words: Fantasy, Genre, Reality, Fiction



Introduction

Stories involving magic, other planets, time travel, and metamorphosis have appeared throughout human history in all languages and literary genres. People are always fascinated by abnormal, supernatural, or impossible phenomena. People want to read fantasy literature because they want to go beyond the limitations of everyday life. From ancient tales to contemporary fiction, people like reading, creating and hearing stories about the improbable, the odd, and the enigmatic. Fantasy-themed themes may be found everywhere—on television, in books, in video games, and even on stage.

Reading fantasy books necessitates the use of imagination. As the name implies, fantasy is the investigation of the fantastic. The author (and reader) are speculating about what may occur rather than studying what might occur. In this way, the interaction between author and reader in fantasy fiction is even more significant than in other types of writing. Fantasy readers have a lot to offer since the function of the imagination is so crucial. The author supplies the background information, the narrative, the characters, the environment, and much more, but readers can add what they wish using their imaginations.

Use of Fantasy in Coetzee's Novels

Daily life is intolerable for people to interact freely with the outside world. In this world, people must engage and face one another. If this contact does not allow them to be who they want, they retreat into their amazing inner world. In this way, many of Coetzee's protagonists in his novels in general and *The Heart of the Country* in particular withdraw into a fantasy realm to



give up on their attempts to forge meaningful connections with others and find happiness. Since the realities of life deny them the joys they seek in life, they invent their fantastical worlds.

The Heart of the Country is a book about South Africa. That is, unsurprisingly, why it is a race novel. In addition, it is a fantasy book in which the main character, Magda, is Coetzee's creation of a fictional being based on her unconscious conflicts and fantasies. Her compulsive monologue also develops through free association of ideas, analysis and interpretation of dreams, and repression of her sexual urges.

Because her father previously experienced sexual fulfilment in the arms of the black bride of the foreman, Magda, a spinster filled with lonesome resentment and the daughter of a sheep farmer, is seeking retribution. This conscience torments the protagonist, making him a lonely figure. It gradually enters her consciousness and haunts her. She writes lengthy and tiresome entries in her journal, which contains this fact. Her mother passed away while she was a little child, and she has no living brothers or sisters. She knows none of her neighbours, never goes to the nearby hamlet, and only hangs out with her father's black personal assistant Hendrik and his young wife, Anna. Since her sole human relationship is with her father, she develops homicidal jealousy of her blatant yearning for attachment to other women. Her rage at him is the main catalyst for the string of fantasies that make up most of her monologue. Her fantasies begin abruptly with the murder of her father and go on to depict her heartbreakingly futile quest for Hendrik and Anna's friendship and affection. "Magda speculates that many melancholy spinsters, like me, lost to history" are dispersed around the nation. (IHC, P.3) She becomes



solipsistic due to her self-analysis. Everywhere Magda looks, she finds evidence of uncertainty, erasure, denial, and conjecture. The first paragraph 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)

Informing the audience that her mother had passed away after delivery, Magda introduces the readers to her father's new wife. However, as previously mentioned, she later casts some doubt on the circumstances surrounding the woman's death, claiming to have been cared for by the woman before she passed away. Additionally, after initially denying the existence of a stepmother, she later repeats the description of that fictitious first arrival by saying, "He has not brought a new wife home" (16), despite acknowledging that the two people arriving at the farm reveal the limits of settler colonialism's institutional structures. In doing so, Co In line with Coetzee, Magda likewise decries colonialism and its abuses. As a result, the novel does not depict any actual occurrences. Instead, in the novel, language and an act of awareness are involved. Later, Magda quickly acknowledges that possibly two donkeys pulled the dogcart before ultimately conceding, with the utmost disregard for the truth, that she was not present at the time. Before returning to her initial claim that she was observing, she conjures up several scenarios, including one on what she may have been doing at the time.



Magda experiences several dreams, and they all follow one another. She believes she is expecting a kid who will lead and be killed along with the "coloured" people in revolt as she imagines the marital sex and her pregnancy. Her suppressed passions give birth to the things she can never do in the actual world in the shape of fantasy. She carries the dream of being raped as a kid so far that her connection appears to be incestuous, even if it is not.

Magda becomes envious of her father's sexual fantasies with the newlywed, and she fears she will murder him. Because she was never sexually active until her middle age, her jealousy results from the Oedipus Complex. The theory of Freudian psychoanalysis is applicable here. Therefore, the agent for the formation of the female-male differentiation is the female infant's desire to abandon the mother and replace her with her father. The mother is adored and despised; she stands for oppression, privilege, dominance, strength, the state, religion, the establishment, the educational system, languages, and literature, among other things. The father, on the other hand, is desired but loathed. The attempt by Magda to kill her father with an axe is recounted in the words that follow, although it's possible that she was only thinking about it.

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 tumultuous. In bed, the woman snaps upright, glaring at her, drenched in blood. (In the Heart 11)

Even though Coetzee depicts Magda's attempts to assassinate her father, he is still alive when the book ends. It just highlights her sincere wish to erase her father's reputation so she can lead a happy life. However, this is not taking place. Instead, she contemplates how she would dispose of her father's body and why she hasn't made any friends due to her deviant behaviour. The story contains suppositions, theories, and ambiguities about the imaginary universe. However, the narrative's main focus is just the protagonist's made-up story. When she thought back to her early years, she pondered the possibility that she had stepbrothers. This would likely explain everything and would have a stronger air of honesty. The word "maybe" conveys the haziness of the situation.

Of all adventures, suicide is the most literary, more so even than murder...Perhaps I strike out once or twice with a 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 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)

The sentences above depict Magda's imagined attempt at suicide via drowning. When she considers suicide and imagines herself jumping into an underground river, she uses imagery from the sea and of underground waters even though it appears that she has never seen the sea. She may eventually perceive the image as improper since it is far from her own life.



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As a linguistic hallmark promoting Magda's narrative mode, the vivid imagination that Magda produces is ritualistically prefaced by "maybe" in the absence of known or recalled evidence. She recognizes her accuracy. "I make up for what I lack in experience in vision" (42). Even though she has trouble recalling precise details of a day, she offers a sequence of five possibilities before recognizing, "There are, however, other ways in which I could have spent the day and which I cannot ignore" (80), a declaration immediately followed by another run of five.

Magda frequently dreams of revolt against the racist and patriarchal norms of rural Afrikaan life in her fantasies of action. Her father, the farm labourers, Hendrik, and Klein Anna are the three main subjects of her fantasies. Two less significant servants, Jakob and Ou-Anna, are thought to have been expelled by Magda's father. Hendrik and Klein Anna, the two servants, are given much attention throughout the book.

She recalls Hendrik's visit to the property six months prior together with his spouse. Six months ago, Hendrik brought his new wife home." (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 entrance of Hendrik's marital house appears to contradict the father bringing Magda's stepmother home in the opening scene. There is an odd sense of similarity and distinction between this section and the novel's opening sentence. We see that Magda has a narrative structure prepared to describe the new pair riding in a cart, the male in his attire, and then the lady, noticing the language comparisons. Coetzee highlights the literary quality of



these instances: this is not how events occur but how Magda begins a story. Here, Coetzee highlights the process of fabulation by highlighting the narrator's unique impression to construct the story by literary patterns⁹ that have grown accustomed to her.

She witnesses how Hendrik's ancestors were wed in her make-believe universe. In the past, when patriarchy prevailed, a husband would have two wives; however, in the present, Hendrik has only one wife and old Jacob and the farmworker 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, 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)

Magda also visualizes the village from where Hendrik brought his bride. Magda, where the servant Hendrik travels to find his bride, provides the stunning backdrop of the impoverished town of Armoede.

The place's name, "Armoede," is too accurate and symbolic, fitting both the name and the scenario. In Magda's Utopia, which she has never seen but can imagine, Hendrik is from the nearby municipality of Armoede. After describing the typical social geography of poverty, Magda then claims that what motivates her to continue is her desire to transcend the situation. "names, names, names" that separates her from this world, "to burst through the screen of names into Armoede's goat's eye view." In reality, she imagines all that she perceives to be true; as a result, the richness of her existence is an illusion and hence a kind of emptiness.



Conclusion

One may argue that the fantasy in the book represents her inner voice, which she has never encountered but longs to manifest in reality. The lines above reveal that Magda is in her chamber while the servants talk about Magda's lack of sex in their bedrooms. We can't ignore the truth that such narrative behaviour emphatically points to, namely that the narrator cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy, chronicle and fabulation, because this pattern of proposing an account and then immediately calling its validity into question is repeated repeatedly throughout the novel.



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