

Disability and the Ethics of Care in J. M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*

LE HANDICAPE ET LES SOINS D'ETHIQUE DU ROMAN DE L'HOMME LENT de J.M. COETZEE

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Abstract

This essay interrogates the interrelationship between bodily disability and the ethics of care in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Slow Man*. It argues that disability emerges as an ethically charged subject, an engagement with the ethics of care. The discussion shows that the novel consists of acts of giving and, thus, receiving care. It is argued that the novel employs and interrogates the language of care and the nuanced meanings of the term. We assert a theme elaborated in Coetzee's earlier fictions that ethics and politics are inseparable and that ethics is the necessary starting point for political commitment in fiction. While the interplay between ethics and politics in Coetzee's apartheid fictions revolves mainly around apartheid politics, the ethics of care interrogated in *Slow Man* reveal a broader realm of relevance in the post-apartheid fictions that includes humans in general. In Coetzee's vision, to suffer, i.e. to need care or to be willing to care for others, is part of being human.

Key words: Coetzee; Ethics; Care; *Slow Man*; Disability; Politics; (post)Apartheid fiction

Résumé

Ce texte interroge les liens entre le handicapé physique et les soins d'éthique du roman de l'homme lent de JM Coetzee. Il soutient que le handicapé apparaît comme un sujet éthique chargée, un engagement avec les soins d'éthique. La discussion montre que le roman consiste en des actes de donner et de recevoir ainsi des soins. Il est

soutenu que le roman emploie et interroge la langue de soins et les significations nuancées avec les termes. Nous affirmons un thème élaboré dans les fictions antérieures Coetzee que l'éthique et la politique sont indissociables et que l'éthique est le point de départ nécessaire pour l'engagement politique dans la fiction. Alors que l'interaction entre éthique et politique d'apartheid dans les fictions de Coetzee tourne principalement autour de la politique d'apartheid, l'éthique des soins interrogé en homme lent révèlent un large domaine de pertinence dans les fictions post-apartheid qui comprend les humains en général. Dans la vision de Coetzee, de souffrir, c'est à dire avoir besoin de soins ou d'être disposé à prendre soin des autres, fait partie de l'être humain.

Mots clés: Coetzee; Ethique; Soins; Homme lent; Handicapé; Politique; Fiction d'apartheid (post)

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INTRODUCTION

In J. M. Coetzee's 1980 novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the narrating magistrate is puzzled by the barbarian woman who shares his life without yielding her history to him. He is confronted with the body of the other he should care for: "I am the same man I always was; but time has broken, something has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere: this woman in my bed, for which I am responsible, or so it seems, otherwise, why do I keep it?" (p. 43). In her crippled state, with broken ankles and half-blind eyes, the disabled woman demands his attention in the form of the lodging, nursing, and employment he offers to her. The magistrate has to interrogate his desire for her and his complicity with her

oppressors. And the novel centers on his ethical dilemma with relation to the victims of imperial oppression or unjust states like the apartheid South Africa of the novel's composition and publication years. The shame he feels for his complicity in oppression is made more tangible to him when he is tortured himself and made to experience what it means "to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself" (p. 113). The magistrate protests to the dehumanizing torture tactics of the imperial regime he serves, which is why he himself becomes its victim. *Waiting for the Barbarians* articulates not only a direct relationship between bodily disability and the administrations of care, but it also stages the ethical encounter with alterity as the basis for the political. The magistrate's encounter with the tortured barbarian woman and other victims makes him publicly denounce political oppression and bear the consequences.

In *Coetzee's Age of Iron* (1990), Mrs. Curren, not wanting to die an abject death of old age and illness, deems salvation to be beginning with the necessary loving of the "unlovable" (p. 136) black youth, John. The novel details her reaction to the direct experience of witnessing human suffering in violent, burning townships under apartheid. She leaves the comfort of her white middle-class life to encounter violence and death. Mrs. Curren and the colored Vercueil, a homeless man who visits her on the day she is diagnosed with terminal bone cancer, have a relationship of mutual care. He is an alcoholic derelict with a disfigured hand, and she is a diseased woman with a mastectomy. She accommodates him in her home yet expects him to care for her after her death by sending her letter to her exiled daughter. Their final embrace in the novel's last scene testifies to their reciprocated care. Moreover, in *Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), the medical officer at the rehabilitation camp meets an emaciated K. This titular protagonist, typically viewed as a victim of racial segregation like apartheid policies in South Africa of the 1970s and 1980s, triggers an ethical response from the medic. The medic cannot but attend to the disabled body of the emaciated, hare-lipped K, thus offering him food and drink and trying to understand his case. Born with a hare lip and a gaping nostril (p. 3), K is a disabled body with a facial disfigurement. The medic thinks of the physically impaired K in ethical terms as an other he is inescapably responsible for: "You have never asked for anything, yet you have become an albatross around my neck. Your bony arms are knotted behind my head, I walk bowed under the weight of you" (p. 146). In these Coetzee apartheid novels, the disabled body of the other demands the attention and benevolent acts of others. Like the magistrate and Mrs. Curren, the medic is puzzled by the otherness of the disfigured body and cannot but

care. The disabled body in Coetzee is a cause for care. It is what triggers a causal mechanism of giving and receiving care. In such apartheid novels, the dynamic ethics of care are usually understood with relation to the victims of apartheid. However this relationship between the ethics of care and bodily disability is even more manifest in a post-apartheid novel belonging to what critics call Coetzee's Australian fiction, his 2005 novel *Slow Man*. The question is: Cannot we legitimately claim that the post-apartheid fictions prove Coetzee's commitment to a suffering humanity and a generalized ethical sense beyond the apartheid context?

Paul Rayment in *Slow Man* loses a leg after an accident. In his new amputated, disabled state, he turns to the nursing profession for support. He is given this care by a professional nurse, Marijana. In return, he wants to care for her son by supporting his education. Just as Marijana is his caregiver, he wants to give to her son, to offer something for her in return. What follows is a more elaborate discussion of the interrelationship between disability and the ethics of care in *Slow Man* and the nuances of the notion of "care" in this novel.

THE BODY AND RECIPROCATED CARE

One morning, Rayment is suddenly hit by a car while riding his bicycle. His awareness of his damaged body comes quickly to him, for when he briefly regains consciousness immediately after the accident he finds that the "body that had flown so lightly through the air has grown ponderous, so ponderous that for the life of him he cannot lift a finger" (pp. 1-2). The new reality governing his life in the post-accident stage is one of bodily pain and loss. In the aftermath of the accident and upon waking up in the hospital, he finds himself in the hands of the caring profession. His disabled body necessitates the medical attention a hospital can provide. Although his right leg is directly hit and is a source of "jagged white pain" (p. 5), the nurse assures him that "everything is taken care of" (p. 4) and the doctor promises to save what can be saved from the bad leg (p. 5). So, Rayment is thrown into the care of the hospital, which is why the doctor, referring to the amputation surgery, asks him "Will you trust me in this?" (p. 5). Because he loses a leg above the knee, and because he is too old for a construction in the opinion of his doctors (p. 7), he is left with the prosthesis option, which he refuses (p. 10). Childless and without a wife or family members, his need for care is more obvious. In response to the doctor's suggestion of an artificial limb, Rayment replies: "I would prefer to take care of myself" (p. 10). However, a disabled body certainly needs external help and more than basic needs. For the disabled, emotional support can be as important as a prospective cure. Rayment is instructed about care of his amputated leg and given instructions and exercises. The doctor

wants to talk to him about “care of the leg” (p. 10), but a violated aging body needs private care just as it needs medical attention. A hospital is the place for such medical attention, but a hospital is a potential place for degradation and indifference: “It is only the pain, and the dragging, sleepless nights in this hospital, this zone of humiliation with no place to hide from the pitiless gaze of the young, that make him wish for death” (p. 13). Trying to adapt to injury and loss, he thinks that “the zone of humiliation” he has entered is the “new home” he has to accept (p. 61). Just as his thoughts make him ponder how suicide leaves one unable to care for one’s body after death regardless of the careful preparations one makes before the event (p. 13), a disabled body needs care beyond a traditional medical treatment. The novel, thus, establishes a distinction between cure and care, between medical attention expected to heal a body—i.e. mechanical care—and loving care expected to touch the soul or overwhelm the recipient of such care.

The novel advocates the latter form of care. Although there is a degree of humiliation arising from Rayment’s “new, curtailed” state (p. 14), shame only heightens his awareness of “indifferent young people going through the motions of caring for him” (p. 15). Indifference, the opposite of care, indicates that care devoid of love, i.e. a possible cure, is not what Rayment needs. As a disabled man, Rayment is an other in a Levinasian sense, “someone who is fundamentally different from you and fundamentally vulnerable” (Rosenstand, 2000: 405). Vulnerability indicates a weakness that demands attention. As Levinas puts it, the other “is so weak that he demands” much care (qtd. in Rosenstand, 2000: 412). A disabled body is not only the opposite of a complete, adequate one but it is also one that often, when disability is visible, demands close attention or sympathy, i.e. variations on care rather than cure.

Rayment’s stay at the hospital is just one encounter with the caring profession. Before he leaves the hospital, he makes arrangements with a social worker for “specialized nursing” (p. 16). In his amputated state, he needs someone to attend to his needs and household chores. Nursing, as a form of care performed on him, is necessitated by his new condition as a “diminished man” (pp. 32-33) with “obscenely curtailed thigh muscles” (p. 33). In one sense, disability dehumanizes by making the disabled abnormal. In another, and more importantly, it underscores our humanity and embodied being. Since he needs someone to care for his wants and needs after he departs the hospital, Mrs Putts—identified as “part of the welfare system,” which the novel defines as “caring for people who cannot care for themselves” (p. 22)—suggests “a care-giver” and “preferably a private nurse, someone with experience of frail care” (p. 17). This triggers a causal mechanism of giving and receiving care that the novel thematically handles. His first assigned nurse, Sheena, schedules for him certain times for stump care as

well as other needs. But Sheena does not turn out to be a nurse he is comfortable with. Another form of abortive care is a class given by a health professional, Madeleine, to help Rayment re-program his body’s limb memories through balancing exercises and “hydrotherapy” (p. 61). By contrast, Marijana Jokić, a Croatian private nurse, has the loving touch Sheena and Madeleine lack. Although she administers forms of care like shopping, cooking, and cleaning (p. 28), she holds stump care to be a priority. She soaps and washes the stump (p. 28). Her care includes exercises and massage for a damaged body, one that he “has no interest in fixing it up, returning it to some ideal efficiency” (p. 32). Just as the magistrate massages the tortured body of the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Marijana cares for Rayment’s body with her hands. It is the personal touch that distinguishes her care from the cures of mechanical medicine. In a sense, she heals the soul trapped within a damaged body.

Marijana dusts the wound that begins to itch “with antibiotic powder and winds it in fresh bandages” (p. 62). After he gives up re-programming and water treatment of Madeleine, he comes to the realization that care rather than cure is what he wants: “If there is any residue of belief in him, it has been shifted to Marijana Jokić, who has no studio and promises no cure, just care” (p. 63). Marijana massages his stump and back without flinching from this curtailed body (p. 63). Her attention to his body is special. Although he sometimes views her care as “no more than orthodox nursing practice,” he asserts that “it is enough. What love there is is all on his side” (p. 63). Care becomes a loving treatment when the person cared for is moved by the care giver or when the care giver moves the person cared for. Under Marijana’s ministrations of care, there is the element of love and passion transferred to Rayment, which is why “what she likes to call his leg is day by day losing its angry colour and swollen look” (p. 35).

In return for Marijana’s care, Rayment wishes to care for her and her children, and provide them with love and protection. He is ready to “give anything to be father to these excellent, beautiful children and husband to Marijana—co-father if need be, co-husband if need be, platonic if need be. He wants to take care of them, all of them, protect them and save them” (p. 72). When he declares his love for her, he expresses love in the language of care: “I love you. That is all. I love you and I want to give you something. Let me” (p. 76). Love here is equivalent to generous giving, to selflessness. If he does not love her, as one critic contends, “maybe he falls in love with being so adequately, responsibly, unsentimentally cared for” (Pellow, 2009: 533). Since he wants to pay for Drago’s education, he is involved in an ethics of caring and giving to others. Over this family, he wants “to extend the shield of his benevolent protection. And he wants to love this excellent woman, their mother. That above all. For which he will pay anything” (p. 77).

In return for the self-denying care he received, he wants to give a different care. Although in Levinas's philosophy our responsibility for the other is a non-reciprocal relation, meaning that we care for the other without expecting something in return, reciprocating care intensifies the ethical encounters we find in the novel. In Levinas's philosophy of the "asymmetrical" relationship to the other, the other does not have to return the love or care given (Rosenstand, 2000: 408). Because Rayment already pays Marijana for her caring duties, his offer of love is not simply an attempt for something in return, but rather an instance of reciprocating care.

There is yet another encounter in the novel built on the interrelationship between disability and the ethics of care. After the surprise Rayment feels at the sudden arrival of the writer Elizabeth Costello, an old woman in her late sixties with a heart condition (p. 80), he finds himself extending his care to her: "Would you like to lie down? There's a bed in my study. Can I make you a cup of tea?" (p. 83). Costello claims she did not ask for him and that rather he came up to her, thus rejecting being an easy object of his care/help and making him the one who deserves her care. She reasons: "I'm sorry. I am intruding, I know. You came to me, that is all I can say. You occurred to me—a man with a bad leg and no future and an unsuitable passion" (p. 85). He offers her food and lodging for the night provided that she leaves in the morning (p. 87). She does not leave. Instead, she prepares for another ethical encounter; Costello introduces another woman in Rayment's life, Marianna, who is blind and who, like him, is in need of physical care, though differently. She tells him that what Marianna needs "is not consolation, much less worship, but love in its most physical expression" (p. 97). Like Rayment, Marianna seeks emotional wholeness, a need emerging out of physical lack. But Marianna also wants to be physically loved in a sexual fling. Costello asks him: "Why not see what you can achieve together, you and Marianna, she blind, you halt?" (p. 97). The reciprocal care he and Marianna are expected to give to each other of love and physical intimacy of the disabled comes at a time when Marijana neglects her caring duties, when she does not care about him. Losing one's sight is, wrongly, an impediment to being loved or desired, to being physically cared for or emotionally supported. One question that happens to Rayment during this awkward session is whether Marianna has been "loved" since she lost her sight (p. 108) as blasted eyes can "kill off a man's desire" (p. 108). Both Rayment and Marianna are handicapped, though differently, but both are engaged in various acts of giving and receiving care to a deserving other. Besides, Marijana and Marianna highlight different aspects and functions of the notion of care.

Marijana, who left Rayment and ignored her caring duties for a while, returns. He is sad because she neglected him but he is still "drunk with the pleasure of having her back, excited too by the money he is about to give

away. Giving always bucks him up, he knows that about himself. Spurs him to give more" (p. 92). In trying to help with Drago's education by giving out money, he is equally willing to give himself to Drago's mother, to extend his care to both mother and son, to act as a loving husband and a caring father. In a sense, he is becoming a father for a son he could not engender. Rayment has no son to take care of him, which is partially why he wants to care for one. Because he did not father children, it is insightful that the care he wants to extend to Drago is, in symbolic terms, a paternal one. Moreover, this highlights the injury he received as symbolic impotence and castration. In this sense, the loss of a leg is equal to the loss of a male member, for both incapacitate the man. Trying to justify his relation with Marijana, he claims, "If I still practise love, I practise it in a different way" (p. 144). This benevolent, non-physical form of love, he implies, is what makes him willing to give for others. The proximity of love and care is apparent in Costello's admonition that what they both as old people need is not exactly love but rather its variant: "What we need is care: someone to hold our hand now and then when we get trembly, to make a cup of tea for us, help us down the stairs. Someone to close our eyes when the time comes. Care is not love. Care is a service that any nurse worth her salt can provide, as long as we don't ask her for more" (p. 154). Costello denies the co-existence of love and care, which takes away any romantic feelings Rayment might have held for Marijana. The care she speaks of is mere nursing for the old. However, he protests: "I understand perfectly well the difference between love and care. I have never expected Marijana to love me" (p. 154). He explains to her, after his accident, that he has been "haunted by the idea of doing good", and that he "would like to perform some act that will be—excuse the word—a blessing, however modest, on the lives of others" (p. 155). He wants to bless Marijana and her children by extending "a protective hand over them" (p. 156). Despite his contention to the opposite, Rayment conflates love with care in his relationship with Marijana. Costello, by contrast, deems nursing to be compatible with frail care. When cure cannot be effected, Costello seems to argue, people need nursing rather than emotional attachments. The novel, hence, elaborates the notion of care into a nuanced concept.

Just as Marijana has given him her care, he wants to give her as well as her children similar care. In a letter he imagines writing to her, he wants to say: "*You have taken care of me; now I want to give something back, if you will let me. I offer to take care of you, or at least to relieve you of some of your burden. I offer to do so because in my heart, in my core, I care for you. You and yours*" (emphasis original; p. 165). The care he gets from Marijana in the form of professional nursing tempered with tenderness, is countered by the care of hearts wants to apply, the care of benefaction and benevolence. As an "ageing cripple," he needs loving care rather than therapy: "not that dismaying

and depressing prospect but this soft, consoling, and eminently feminine presence. *There, there, be calm, it is all over*: that is what he wants to hear. Also: *I will stay by your side while you sleep*" (emphasis original; p. 208). This is the kind of care he expects from Marijana after he falls in the shower. However, it is Drago, acting as his son, who comes to his aid after his mother leaves, and Rayment, still having back pain and unable to reach the bathroom, urinates on the floor (p. 214). Drago helps "a helpless old man in urinous pyjamas trailing an obscene pink stump behind him from which sodden bandages are slipping" (p. 214). Marijana and Costello are absent, but care for the disabled comes from Drago. In this instance of filial care, Drago fulfils Costello's understanding of care as a form of nursing ethically grounded, but not necessarily motivated by love.

The child Rayment wants to take care of by funding his education takes care of him now, substituting the child he never had. In a letter to Miroslav, Rayment offers love and expects the same. He writes: *"It is not just money that I offer. I offer certain intangibles too, human intangibles, by which I mean principally love. I employed the word godfather, if not to you then to Marijana. Or perhaps I did not utter the word, merely thought it. My proposal is as follows. In return for a substantial loan of indefinite term, to cover the education of Drago and perhaps other of your children, can you find a place in your hearth and in your home, in your heart and home, for a godfather?"* (emphasis original; p. 224). Rayment's proposal is meant to enable him to pour his love on Miroslav's family, to be the father who cares for his family by blessing them with love and money. If he is not the biological father, he wants to be the spiritual one who supports or sponsors, i.e. who cares. The language of the heart that he speaks to Miroslav is the language of care. The religious terms of his language put him in a divine position of transcendent care, which is why the word "godfather" is significant. Acting within the logic of mutual care, Rayment expects love from the Miroslavs in return for the loving care he offers them.

Just as Rayment uses the language of reciprocated care with the Miroslavs, so does Costello employ similar terms. She offers him a deal according to which she will give him language lessons to enable him to "speak from the heart" (p. 231) and express his love. She offers more in the form of mutual care: *"In all other respects I will take care of you; and perhaps in return you will learn to take care of me*. When the appointed day arrives, you can be the one to close my eyelids and stuff cotton wool up my nostrils and recite a brief prayer over me. *Or vice versa, if I am the one left behind"* (my emphasis: 232). Rayment's reply to her offer of reciprocated care is also significant. When he says, *"It sounds like marriage"* (p. 232), the meaning we are expected to get is that marriage is a form of giving and receiving care. Moreover, the more one is pushed into the physical realm of old age, disability, the greater the need for care/love will be. Costello's proposal is enacted by

Rayment when he finds her asleep at the table in his living room and he slips a pillow under her head, which makes her the object of his care. The act is not exactly "tender" but rather "humane." He thinks that it is "what one old person might do for another old person who is not well. Humane" (p. 237). He cares for her out of obligation; she is the other woman who, unannounced, came to him as an unwelcome guest. The language of reciprocated care he employs with Marijana is not used with Costello. With Costello, care is a form of duty or an ethical imperative with no feelings attached to it. With Marijana and her children, care is more personal, more affectionate. In return for his attempted care, the Miroslavs enact the logic of reciprocated care. They prepare him a recumbent bicycle by way of thanking him for his offer (p. 254). Just as he wants to be a godfather for Drago, so does the latter act as a godson tending a disabled man by helping Rayment to be mobile again.

Costello, contradicting an earlier assertion, confesses at the end of the novel that the kind of care she is after is "loving care" rather than mere nursing (p. 261) or one motivated by a sense of duty. Their parting after the visit to the Miroslav family goes without Rayment offering her to go with him or offering her food or sleep. He speaks "no word" (p. 262). Instead, he examines the old Costello and then "he examines his heart. 'No,' he says at last, 'this is not love. This is something else. Something less'" (p. 263). Care here emerges as what is less than love or loving care, an ethical tribute we pay to the other. The novel, hence, makes a distinction between unconditional forms of care motivated by or enacted with love and conditional forms of care—as evidenced by Rayment's "no"—driven by mere ethics. It employs and interrogates the language of care and the ethical nuances of the term. Coetzee uses Rayment and Costello "to demonstrate the constant threat of loneliness, particularly to people who perceive themselves as becoming 'aged'" (Pellow, 2009: 529). When people are lonely, sick, or old, their need for different forms of care (just like their otherness) is more manifest.

Since Rayment has to come to terms with his new inadequate body, he expresses bodily desires in terms of the language of care. For instance, he "does not care to become the object of any woman's sexual charity, however good-natured" (p. 38). Because he lost touch with his family in Europe, he used to take care of himself, and now that he is disabled, he needs others to care for him. After a conversation with Marijana about caring in which she asks him about who will take care of him in the future, the notion of care is highlighted as a pivotal theme, although one that is difficult to pin down: *"But her question echoes in his mind. Who is going to take care of you?"* The more he stares at the words *take care of*, the more inscrutable they seem" (emphasis original; p. 43). After his reply that he will take care of himself, a different form of caring comes to his mind, a variation

on the one we find in Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999), disposing of a dog through a shotgun not incineration and out of annoyance rather than love/caring. That form of care, "with a shotgun, was certainly not what Marijana had in mind. Nevertheless, it lay englobed in the phrase, waiting to leak out. If so, what of his reply: *I'll take care of myself?* What did his words mean, objectively? Did the taking care, the caretaking he spoke of extend to donning his best suit and swallowing down cache of pills, two at a time, with a glass of hot milk, and lying down in bed with his hands folded across his breast?" (emphasis original; p. 44). Suicide is a form of caring he ponders. It is a way of ending the miserable life of a disabled body. In this sense, getting rid of annoyance is a form of care. David Lurie in *Disgrace* gives up the animals he cares for by offering them to the lethal needle and taking care of their disposal after death because he does not want their corpses to be crushed with shovels into "a more convenient shape for processing" (p. 146). Coetzee's fiction makes the idea of care a life principle, and extends it to the event of death and even to non-human animals. Regardless of its exact meaning, care in Coetzee is ethically resonant; it counters violence and apathy.

CONCLUSION

In a discussion of Paul Celan's poetry, Emmanuel Lévinas (1978) discusses the poem for Celan as "the spiritual act *par excellence*" (p. 21), and as an act of giving or responsibility to the other toward whom the poem goes (p. 17). Based on this logic, we can argue that *Slow Man* is founded on similar ethics of care. The writer gives the generous offer that is the novel to the reader who is the recipient of the writer's gift. The novel is modeled after the ethics of giving and receiving care it employs. It complicates the ethics of care at both structural and thematic levels. As readers of such ethical fiction, we are expected to attend to its depiction of disabled others. Michael Marais (2009) in an argument informed by the work of Derrida and Levinas, argues that "Coetzee's concern with hospitality is evident in his extensive use in his fiction of the trope of the arrival of the stranger who precipitates change in the host who receives her" (p. 274). Marais discusses the relationship between writer and reader in terms of the language of care, of hosts and visitors, in terms of "the ethic and aesthetic of hospitality" (p. 296). To add to this logic of hospitality, within *Slow Man* care givers like Marijana act as hosts for the otherness of the disabled bodies they care for, and the disabled like Rayment host the otherness of other disabled bodies imposed on them like Costello and Marianna.

If the novel is structured after and revolves around the dynamics of care and ethical encounters, it reasonably follows that its ethical vision is significant. *Slow Man*, as a relatively recent piece of fiction among Coetzee's post-apartheid fictions, enriches the ethics incorporated in the apartheid novels and testifies to Coetzee's commitment to produce fictions that often treat the political in terms of the ethical. In a sense, Coetzee asserts the impossibility of separating the ethical from the political. Marais (1998) legitimately argues for a kind of engagement with history, with colonial history, in Coetzee's work that is based on the ethics of responsibility and suggests that "politics *begins* as ethics in his fiction" (emphasis original; p. 45). He highlights Coetzee's concern for the other in his fictions as grounds for political relevance, but he contends that Coetzee's approach does not emphasize "resistance," "force," or "potency" (p. 59). Just as the novel underscores that disabled, aging bodies need attention and various administrations of care, it also points to a general, humanistic concern for the other one can detect in the apartheid fictions. Motivated by love or not, care as an ethical response to the other guarantees the abnegation of political violence and ensures a fair, humane treatment of fellow human (and even non-human) beings. Coetzee's fiction signifies that when we "care" for each other by acting out of love or, alternatively, out of an ethical sense of duty, we necessarily move beyond injustice and oppression. To respond to Marais, the "force" of Coetzee's fiction is, paradoxically, a disarming ethical vision.

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