

Coetzee's Novel the Slow Man; A Critical Study

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 7

Issue: 3

Month: June

Year: 2019

ISSN: 2320-2645

Received: 24.04.2019

Accepted: 28.05.2019

Published: 01.06.2019

Citation:

Rajamuruhaiyan, GA, and A. Soundararajan. "Coetzee's Novel the Slow Man; A Critical Study." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2019, pp. 51–54

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v7i3.465>



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G. A. Rajamuruhaiyan

(REG. NO. P5607)

Part Time Ph.D Scholar in English

M.S.S. Wakf Board College, Madurai

A. Soundararajan

Guide & Supervisor

Head & Associate Professor of English

PG and Research Department of English

M.S.S. Wakf Board College, Madurai

Abstract

In Slow Man, Coetzee examines what goes on inside the psyche of a person who encounters unforeseen difficulties. In this book, Coetzee approaches problems on a personal level. The existence of a man who is content in his old age is the subject of this book. He suffers the loss of a limb in an accident, attempts to live alone, avoids the society of both friends and acquaintances, and has plenty of time to rediscover himself. He receives care from a Croatian caregiver, who also assists him with housework. She doesn't in any way support him as he grows fascinated by her. As he explores the complexities of selfhood, the protagonist asks himself a lot of questions. As the author, he also participates in writing, bringing the author and the character together to discuss their connection.

Keywords: Tribulations, Introspective, Human Psyche, Curtailed, Disillusioned, Coaxing, Cajoling, Ablutions, Calamity, Incapacitated, Discernible, Beseech, Indignant, Immense Tidiness, Compelling, Platonic, Calamity

Responses to the book *Slow Man* have been conflicting. The book's main character, Paul Rayment, is struck by a fast vehicle and knocked to the ground. Rayment is riding his bicycle when a juvenile lad who is driving his vehicle recklessly crashes on him. He loses his limb as a consequence, and it must be amputated above the knee. He won't permit him to retain a carer or don a prosthesis. He doesn't meet up with his pals because he doesn't want them to witness his new, limited, degrading, and humiliated condition. A shift in this man's mental outlook results from his physical weakness because losing his self-respect is analogous to having his limb amputated. What does losing a limb mean in the grand scheme of things, he muses? In the grand scheme of things, losing a limb is merely a practise run for losing everything. (SM 15). Rayment is so depressed by his current situation that he even wants to die.

Slow Man represents a significant change in direction from the previous books' themes. Coetzee reflects on existence, the role of man, and human character. After losing his limb, Rayment feels a feeling of futility. His range of motion is restricted, and he needs assistance to survive. Though he was getting older, he was still living on his own, so this is a dreadful psychological jolt for him. He laments not having children and finds it difficult to embrace his new situation. Rayment is well aware that Wayne Bliethe, the boy who had caused the mishap, has no remorse when he pays him a call.

Rayment hires a nurse to take care of his requirements, but he disapproves of the nurses chosen to take care of him. He wants to be left alone and doesn't like their nagging and pleading. When they speak down to him, he becomes furious. He resembles Michael K, the main character of Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K*, in that he is not pleased when the medical doctor expresses interest in him. Rayment is not looking for anyone's pity or assistance. The advent of Marijana Jokic, a Croatian nurse whom Rayment favours for her matter-of-fact demeanour and because she does not fuss about him, is a saving grace for Paul Rayment. Slowly, he begins to fall in love with her, and one day he even reveals his feelings to her, but she doesn't return the sentiment. He promises to cover the cost of her son's schooling to demonstrate his concern for her. Her family becomes divided as a result, and when her husband learns of Rayment's offer, he becomes so furious that he beats her. She then makes the decision to remain with her in-laws.

Rayment is still connected to her through her kids. In addition to helping her daughter, who was in trouble after being discovered shoplifting, he also lets her son remain with him. He enjoys the satisfaction of fatherhood by doing this. Rayment longs for this woman's companionship in his helpless condition, but she does not bolster him. He yearns for Marijana's love because of his lonely existence. He struggles with adjusting to his new role as a reliant and yearns for a sexual encounter with Marijana.

His private is respected by Marijana. She assists him with his personal hygiene patiently and without using baby talk, according to the novel's third-person narrator. She withdraws herself when he says he wishes to be left alone. (SM 28). He appreciates the effort she puts into her job. He tells himself, "A decent woman, through and through." (SM33). On one of his trips to the hospital, he notices two women: one is youthful and has eyeglasses covering the top of her face; the other is an older woman who is stooped and has a hawk-like snout. Since the injury, the younger lady has been the first to pique his attention in a sexual manner in his memory. His old friend Margaret McCord calls and sees him in the meantime, proposing to have sex. Although well-intentioned, "He does not care to be the object of

any woman's sexual charity" (SM 37) and he does not want to show his disfigured body to even an old acquaintance. The readers discover that Rayment is self-conscious of his deformity throughout the entire book. Following Margaret's visit, he begins to fantasise about women, and the woman he sees most frequently is the one he saw at the hospital wearing the dark spectacles.

Rayment is a guy who harbours a lot of remorse. If he has his own child, he imagines that his son will succeed him. He desires a boy who will be his heir and who will be a younger, bigger, and superior image of himself (SM 45). In his elderly age, Rayment wishes he had a boy to be his heir. When he considers this, he feels a feeling of hopelessness. He is aware that his passing would make him unremembered. Coetzee conveys the fundamental human wish to be remembered after death through Rayment. In the Australian books, which are a total departure from the earlier South African novels, he is obsessed with old age and mortality. Rayment, like everyone else, forgets all the theory one typically believes one should embrace when faced with the tragedy of living without a limb. He finds it difficult to adjust to his new situation. His ability to move is limited, and he requires a nurse's assistance to complete his daily tasks. He has to deal with carers who treat him like a kid while maintaining his dignity and regard. He considers

Fate deals you a hand, and you play the hand you are dealt. You do not whine, you do not complain. That, he used to believe, was his philosophy. Why then can he not resist these plunges into darkness? (SM 54)

According to Coetzee, the catastrophe that reduced his universe to a smaller size made him a prisoner. But escaping mortality should have shocked him, unlocked doors inside of him, and restored his perspective on how valuable life is. Nothing along those lines has happened. The storyteller is optimistic about life. Given that he narrowly avoided mortality, he believes Rayment ought to have been more conscious. He doesn't seem to have any more profound ideas after his near-death experience. He responds just like any other regular guy would in the face of such a tragedy. He is desperate to be with

Marijana because he believes she could be their mother.

A woman built for motherhood. Marijana would have helped him out of childlessness. Marijana could mother six, ten, twelve and still have love left over, mother-love. But too late now: how sad, how sorry!(SM 34)

If that isn't feasible, he would love to be her children's foster parent. "However, he will do anything to be a father to these wonderful, beautiful children and a husband to Marijanaco-father if necessary, co-husband if necessary, platonic if necessary; he wants to care for them all, protect them, and save them." (SM 72).

In *Slow Man*, Coetzee presents Elizabeth Costello and poses several fictitious queries. The main character is aware of Drago's academic background. She prepares Rayment for a discussion with her spouse by reminding him that Marijana has a husband. She asks him to focus on the crone and the woman wearing the spectacles instead of Marijana. He could not possibly be in a partnership with a complete lady like Marijana. Costello believes that the blind lady, who was also rendered helpless, could be the start of a meaningful connection. She provides him with all of the woman's details and sets up a date. She has a look inside his head and is completely familiar with him. Coetzee claims that the process of creating a book takes a long time. The book changes from being an object to being a location that one visits every day for a few hours for years on end. What occurs there has an increasingly hazy connection to the way one conducts their everyday lives or the lives of those around them. He believed that the literary process had nothing to do with daily events. The writer's world is very distinct from his actual world because he invents his own worlds for his works.

It's important that Rayment and the lady with the spectacles cross paths. He has intercourse with her when she approaches him, but later he begins to doubt that she wasn't just another call girl and not the same person he had seen in the hospital. He is aggravated by Costello I implore you to let me move on with my existence and drop me. Instead, write about your blind Marianna. She is capable of more than I ever will be. (SM 117)

Rayment is upset that Costello is looking for people to write about for a book. Elizabeth's entry is analogous to the novel's author's entry. At times, she seems to force him to do what she wants even though she professes to be the creator of Rayment. Instead of the author battling with the character in this story, the reverse is true. She once tells Rayment that she is just like the elderly man when he attempts to get rid of Costello by claiming that he had visitors. Rayment objects, saying, "No, you're not, Mrs. Costello. I'm going to demonstrate that I am not in any way under your authority.(SM 129). Here, Coetzee claims that the writer has the character in his or her grasp and encounters opposition when attempting to write about the character. The figure does not give in readily, and Coetzee gets involved in the writing process. He provides a description of the writing process and how the characters determine the plot's development.

Drago, Marijana's son, arrives to remain with him as soon as he gets to send Costello away. He informs him about the domestic altercation in which his father punched his mother and she left. The following day, he returns with Costello, who claims that they ran into one another in Victoria Square. Then, Costello advises Rayment that as soon as he decides on a course of action regarding Marijana, the woman in the spectacles, or Mrs. McCord, the two of them may separate ways.

I am unable to suggest what that line of action should be; you must decide what it should be. I wouldn't need to be here if I knew what was going to happen next. (SM 36)

Costello intrudes into Rayment's life, and she is present in his home watching him and making decisions about his future. She assures Rayment that finishing the tale is in his hands and that she won't get in the way. Drago brings some of Rayment's photo collection with him when he remains with him. Rayment had some excellent images of the well-known photojournalist Fauchery. He uses the computer to place the images of his family after discovering that Drago tampered with them. Rayment is furious and wants to know what happened to the real Fauchery. He quickly grows tired of the raucous environment Drago and his companions have made in the home. When Rayment discusses his past with

Costello, she remarks, “Your past life was uncharted territory.” (SM 195). She claims that despite being a novelist, she does not fully understand his existence. She does not start out with the full picture.

Rayment doesn’t discuss his partner but does share his opinions on art. He is extended an invitation to move in with Elizabeth Costello in Carlton, where she promises to take good care of him and allow them to live in harmony. It’s fascinating to note that Coetzee had moved to Australia at the time the book was written and was residing there with his partner Dorothy Driver. She therefore approaches Rayment as a fictional figure whose way of life she will record in her book. When Costello brings Rayment to Marijana’s home one day to inform her of the lost photos, she exhibits defensiveness. He discovers that they have repaired his bike to his astonishment. It was altered to become an upright bike. As they return home, Costello and Rayment talk about their meeting. Costello claims that if he had displayed his rage, he would have lost Drago. He does not invite her to his flat before saying good-bye.

One is silent shocked when reading *Slow Man* because Coetzee’s greatness has been maintained for so long and his fictional interventions continue to be so precise and riveting. It is also regarded as a subpar book. The readers are so used to his extreme organisation as a writer that even the smallest amount of disarray appears chaotic.

The novel’s conclusion implies that fictitious characters’ lives are not subject to the author’s influence. Additionally, Coetzee makes observations about Paul Rayment, a man looking for a purpose in life after experiencing misfortune, and Elizabeth Costello, a writer currently engaged in the writing process. Rayment’s reluctance to veer off course serves as *Slow Man*’s climax. While Coetzee can speak about South Africa, he can never return there, he makes this plain. The ways in which Coetzee forces the protagonist to examine himself and talk about different facets of his character are the focus of *Slow Man*. Compared to Coetzee’s other books, the novel has been approached from a very distinct perspective.

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Author details

G. A. Rajamuruhaian, (REG. NO. P5607), Part Time Ph.D Scholar in English, M.S.S. Wakf Board College, Madurai

Dr. A. Soundararajan, Guide & Supervisor, Head & Associate Professor of English, PG and Research Department of English, M.S.S Wakf Board College, Madurai