



Slow Man

J.M. Coetzee

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Paul Rayment is on the threshold of a comfortable old age when a calamitous cycling accident results in the amputation of a leg. Humiliated, his body truncated, his life circumscribed, he turns away from his friends.

He hires a nurse named Marijana, with whom he has a European childhood in common: hers in Croatia, his in France. Tactfully and efficiently she ministers to his needs. But his feelings for her, and for her handsome teenage son, are complicated by the sudden arrival on his doorstep of the celebrated Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello, who threatens to take over the direction of his life and the affairs of his heart.

Slow Man Details

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Author : J.M. Coetzee

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From Reader Review Slow Man for online ebook

Connie says

"The blow catches him from the right, sharp and surprising and painful, like a bolt of electricity, lifting him up off the bicycle." Paul Rayment, a photographer in Adelaide, finds himself in a hospital recovering from a bicycle accident, with one leg amputated above the knee. He refuses a prosthesis and opts for nursing care. After going through a succession of nurses, he develops feelings for a Croatian nurse, Marijana, a married woman with three children. In addition to his loss of independence and the problems of aging, Paul is coping with loneliness and regrets over never having children. He attempts to have Marijana and her children play a major part of his life.

The first third of the novel seems realistic. Then the novelist Elizabeth Costello shows up at Paul's door, an annoying woman who he has never met. (She is a character from J.M. Coetzee's previous novel.) She starts reciting the passage at the top of this review, "The blow catches him..." When she first heard those words, she had asked herself, "Why do I need this man?" Elizabeth Costello seems to be a stand-in for the author Coetzee since she knows all about Paul and the other characters. She uses her knowledge to try to prod Paul into action. At the same time, Paul is feeling that she is using his reactions to create a character for a book that she is writing. She's a persistent woman, constantly visiting, although he keeps trying to get rid of her. Paul, who immigrated from France to Australia as a child, is working through his feelings about home, about belonging, and about love. After a career as a portrait photographer, Paul seems to be thinking about who the man in his own mirror is as a person.

The reader is watching Elizabeth Costello interact with Paul as she gets material for the story that Coetzee has written and we are reading. While it's a creative idea, it also moves the story from a realistic plane to a position where the reader no longer knows what is real and what is unreal. But that's Coetzee--an author who has fun playing around with the readers' minds.

Mevsim Yenice says

Bisiklet kazas? sonucu bak?ma muhtaç kalan bir adam?n dönü?ümünü çarp?c? ?ekilde anlatm?? Coetzee. Zorunluluklar, körelen duygular?n yerini alan ba?ka duygular, göçmen olmak, adand??m?z ?eyler, sahip olduklar?m?z, yitirdiklerimiz, hiç sahip olamad?klar?m?z ve hatta olamayacaklar?m?z, dil meselesi ve daha bir çok konuyu katmanl? bir roman.

Bunlar da kitapta be?enip alt?n? çizdi?im birkaç yer:

"Çocuklar bizler sevmeyi ve hizmet etmeyi ö?renelim diye vard?r. Çocuklar?m?z sayesinde zaman?n hizmetkarlar?na dönü?ürüz. Yüre?inin içine bak. Kendine bu yolculuk için gerekli azme ve dayan?kl?l?l??a sahip olup olmad??n? sor. Bunlara sahip de?ilsen belki de geri ad?m atmal?s?n."

"Bir insan en kötü yönlerimizi, en kötü ve incitici yönlerimizi biliyorsa ve bunlar? söylemeyip gizliyor, bize gülümsemeyi ve ?akalar yapmay? sürdürüyorsa buna ne deriz? Sevgi deriz. Hayat?n?n bu son döneminde, ba?ka kimden sevgi görebilirsin ki seni çirkin ihtiyar? Evet, çirkin ne demektir ben de bilirim. ?kimiz de çirkiniz Paul, ya?l? ve çirkiniz. Dünyan?n tüm güzelliklerini kucaklamak istesek de. ?çimizdeki bu arzu asla

sönmez. Ama dünyanın tüm güzellikleri ikimizi de istemiyor. Hatta bize sunulan neyse kabul etmek durumundayız, yoksa aç kalırız."

rachel says

I found Paul's character quite well developed, particularly his self-absorption (e.g., others seem to exist only in his limited perception of them). I found myself thinking about the psychological theory of the tasks of middle-to-advanced age. Namely, a sense of accomplishment is key to navigating the final stages of life. This seems to be Paul's problem; when he reflects on his life, he feels he has accomplished little and is particularly bothered by the fact that he is childless.

Despite my appreciation of the main character, I agree with many of the other reviewers, in that I found the addition of the magical author character rather incongruous with the first half of the novel. She was distracting. I found myself wondering whether she was real/magical, whether she was necessary to the story, and whether the main character suffered some sort of closed head injury in the accident. These thoughts made it difficult to concentrate on what should have been the central themes of the novel: aging, intimacy, meaningful engagement with others, accomplishment.

Ahmed says

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Jon says

This is a complicated book to write about in a few words. On one level it is a story of a sad, isolated man who suffers the loss of a leg in an accident and who becomes hopelessly and inappropriately infatuated with the woman taking care of him. On another level it is the a mediation about the craft of fiction writing and the mysterious relationship between the writer (Coetzee aka Elizabeth Costello) and the character he/she is creating. At the half-way point of the story, the protagonist says something that is a so disastrous that the

author must come on stage to try to rescue the story. The two levels are intricately woven together in the second half of the book, which ends with an unexpected act of simple kindness that deeply touches the central character. I came away with a real sense of compassion for the shut-down humanity of the slow man -- because, of course, some part of me is a slow man too. Coetzee deserves his Nobel.

Sean says

I can't deny that JM Coetzee is indeed a talented writer. Clear, concise, exacting prose. And duh, he did win the Nobel Prize after all. But I don't think this one is the one read. ("Disgrace" probably is.) What starts out as a quite conventional story soon morphs into something bordering on ludicrous. Is it magical realism? A darkly comedic satire on death vs. consciousness? Or just a novelist indulging in not having to adhere to any chosen path or structure? And not bothering to answer some key questions about certain characters? As a mediation on aging, intimacy and mortality, it excels. As a "novel", it fails to deliver a coherent narrative. And soon becomes tedious. If it weren't so short and a fast read, I probably would've tossed it aside.

Megan Baxter says

This is my first Coetzee, and for the first sixty pages, it seemed to be an interesting but not arresting book about an older man coping with losing a leg, and his mobility and freedom, and the after effects of such a loss, including falling in love with his nurse. Nothing earthshattering.

And then the author showed up.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Weltschmerz says

Moj prvi Kuci, verovatno i poslednji, ukoliko ne dobijem neku baš oduševljenu, pouzdanu preporuku. Iako mi se roman nimalo ne dopada, ?udno mi je kako mi je ipak uspelo da primetim koliko je pitko i nepretenciozno napisan, uprkos tome što je sama ideja u neku ruku pretenciozna. Autor se, ?ini mi se, bavi razli?itim nivoima frustracije, egzistencijalne, stvarala?ke i kona?no ?itala?ke, ali uprkos efektu koji ne izostaje, ovo jednostavno nije tip romana u kakvom ja mogu da uživam.

Charles Matthews says

This review originally appeared in the San Jose Mercury News:

When you've won every possible literary award, including the Nobel Prize, you're entitled to indulge yourself a little. That, at least, is my explanation for how J.M. Coetzee came up with this fascinating flop of a

novel.

"Slow Man" begins with Paul Rayment, a photographer who lives in Australia, losing a leg in a bicycle accident. The 60-year-old Rayment, who lives alone and has no close family, descends into bitterness. He refuses to have a prosthesis fitted and crankily dismisses a series of visiting nurses until he finally finds one, a Croatian woman named Marijana, with whom he can get along. Then gradually he realizes that he's falling in love with her, which is something of a problem because she's married and has three children.

At this point, about a third of the way into the book, we have few hints that this will be anything other than a conventional novel, albeit one animated by Coetzee's superb ability to make us feel the pain, rage and frustration that a Paul Rayment must feel.

Then into Paul's life (if we can call it that) walks the novelist Elizabeth Costello, who informs him, "You occurred to me -- a man with a bad leg and no future and an unsuitable passion. That was where it started. Where we go from there I have no idea."

Both the reader and Paul are perplexed as to why this aging woman has suddenly shown up at his flat and announced that she's moving in. ("I will be a model guest, I promise. I won't hang my undies in your bathroom. . . . Most of the time you won't notice I am here. Just a touch on the shoulder, now and then, to keep you on the path?") All he knows is that she's a famous writer: "He tried once to read a book by her, a novel, but gave up on it, it did not hold his attention."

We know -- or probably should, anyway -- that Elizabeth Costello was the title character of Coetzee's immediately previous book, published in 2003. And when she quotes to Paul the opening sentences of "Slow Man," we begin to get the idea: He's a character in a novel that she's writing. And both of them are characters in a novel that Coetzee's writing. And once you've stuck your head into that metafictional and metaphysical maze, there's no turning back.

Elizabeth Costello turns out to be an amusingly irritating and didactic busybody. She dominates the middle part of the novel, as she tries to get Paul to resolve the impasse in his life -- and her novel. She's mostly passive-aggressive, but occasionally she interferes directly, as when she sets up a liaison between Paul and a mysterious woman whom she brings to his flat. Paul and the woman make love, though neither can see the other: She's blind, and he's blindfolded.

This odd incident is a narrative dead end. It has no effect on Paul other than to make him reflect on how he's become the author's puppet: "Or might the Costello woman be writing two stories at once, stories about characters who suffer a loss (sight in the one case, ambulation in the other) which they must learn to live with; and, as an experiment or even as a kind of professional joke, might she have arranged for their two life-lines to intersect? He has no experience of novelists and how they go about their business, but it sounds not implausible."

As Paul's exasperation with Elizabeth Costello grows, we get a kind of reverse spin on Pirandello: not six characters in search of an author, but one character trying to escape from an author. But there's only one way Paul can escape from Elizabeth Costello, as she explains to him: "The sooner you settle on a course of action and commit yourself to it, the sooner you and I, to our mutual relief, will be able to part." In other words, if a writer creates a character, it's up to the character -- not the author -- to work out his or her destiny. "For me alone Paul Rayment was born and I for him," she says. "His is the power of leading, mine of following; his of acting, mine of writing."

But for all the hall-of-mirrors cleverness of making an author and her character interact as characters in a novel, Coetzee has simply rung a change on an age-old novelistic convention: the omniscient narrator. No, George Eliot didn't wander around Middlemarch nudging Dorothea and Ladislaw into action, but the effect of having an author who knows what's going on in her characters' heads isn't very different from what Coetzee winds up doing here. Once you've accepted the premise that fiction is something that somebody makes up, and that it has a complex relationship with what we call real life, you haven't gone much further than most of us do when we take our first college lit courses.

"Slow Man" finally rises out of the muddle of metaphysics to become a story again, working out Paul's increasingly complicated relationship with Marijana and her family, especially her teenage son, Drago, for whom Paul mistakenly tries to become a surrogate father.

And Elizabeth Costello becomes more than just a meddlesome authorial fairy godmother: She has her own story, a set of personal problems to work out in tandem with the ones that she has imposed on Paul -- or from her point of view, allowed Paul to impose on himself.

But by the time the novel's ending arrives, it feels tired and anticlimactic, as if too much thinking about fiction has sapped the life out of it. "Slow Man" is undeniably perceptive about many things, and throughout it there is the pleasure of watching a brilliant mind at work and play. But when a novelist gets too self-conscious about writing a novel, he or she probably can't give us what we really want a novel to do: feel like life -- unmediated life.

Larry Buhl says

I hate books that make me feel dumb. In some cases I assume it's the author's fault, bad writer trying to be clever, failing. In this case, the guy has won every writing award possible, so he MUST be brilliant and I MUST be missing something. It starts off well: aging single man has a bike accident and loses his leg, pities himself and ruminates on his life. Clear, concise. Then it takes a jaunt into Twilight Zone territory. An annoying woman, an author, that he doesn't know, moves in and takes over his life and brings over a blind woman for him to bed. M-kay. It's Charlie Kauffman territory - either you get it and love it or you don't and you don't. I didn't/didn't.

Tommy says

What I love about Coetzee is that he isn't afraid of fitting a tire over the goat's torso. As I'm reading the reviews of this book from my other Goodreads buddies, many seem disturbed by the character Elizabeth Costello, who truly breaks with logic and knows impossible details of characters. In other words she is a meta-character who speechifies some of the arguments and questions I'm sure Coetzee had in writing this book, and in the hands of a post-modernist dilettante, this character would have simply been self-indulgence, an intellectual exercise that proves how smart and well-read the writer is. But Coetzee uses this character in a much more dazzling and unsettling way, the same way Beckett uses his characters to inch closer to the terrors of black nothing. EC can't be dismissed as a "meta-character" because she materializes with the same fullness as any other character in the book. Coetzee puts in work to give her the same physical gestures and sensory life of Paul Rayment. You don't quite know how to receive this woman. You empathize with her,

you hear her rattling cough, but you also know she's mannered, overly handled by The Author. This makes you examine the idea of "character," and you realize there are only slight differences, at least in theory, between EC and the rest of the gang. I felt wonderfully weird reading this book.

In The Life and Times of Michael K, Coetzee pulls a similar move in breaking the symmetry of the book, using a 1st person narrative that recounts the first 3/4's of the book told in 3rd person. This move itself wasn't what disturbed the reader. It was the position of this move, about 3/4's into the book. Huh? Cynthia Ozick considered this the only flaw in the book, but maybe I just see flaws as artistic necessities. What are we trying to do, make the perfect reproduction of the world? Or are we trying to bend light and distort so that the world can experience what the artist sees? I loved this book.

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Quân Khuê says

Có th? nói m?i quan h? gi?a tôi v?i cu?n sách này là m?t m?i quan h? yêu-ghét. Tôi thích m?t vài ph?n, ghét m?t vài ph?n, và r?t cu?c th? không rõ mìn? yêu hay ghét cu?n sách. V?n c?a Coetzee v?n th?, tinh, g?n, s?o; tuy nhiên, s? xu?t hi?n c?a nh?n v?t nh? v?n Elizabeth Costello có v? làm cho cu?n ti?u thuy?t k?m thành th?c. V?n bi?t nh?n v?t này là m?t trò ch?i ti?u thuy?t c?a nh? v?n, nh?ng có v? ?ây là m?t trò ch?i ch?a thuy?t ph?c. N?u ??c Coetzee, th? Disgrace, Michael K, Waiting for Barbarians, c? Summertime, là nh?ng cu?n xu?t s?c h?n Slow Man.

Ph?n nào cu?n sách này g?i nh? ??n Paul Auster, ng??i c?ng hay gi? chiêu metafiction trong các ti?u thuy?t c?a mìn?. ?t vì có ?i?m chung mà Auster v?i Coetzee m?i th? t? v?i nhau trong nhi?u n?m li?n ?? r?i t?p sách t?p h?p th? t? c?a hai ông "Here and There" ?ã có th? ra m?t cách ?ây vài tháng.

M. Sarki says

I read far more than was necessary to finally determine this book was not worth reading. Upon the entrance

of Elizabeth Costello I knew pretty much that I was in for a weighty disappointment. The main character and his stubborn life-style refusals and insistence on furthering an ill-fated and inappropriate love affair left me feeling basically disgusted with the pitiful old gent. I was embarrassed for all aging men and what they might become if served heaped on a plate filled with leftover mediocrities. I have no idea what possessed a man of such talent as Coetzee's to write this drivel and why he allowed it to even be published. The text is nothing short of despicable and I doubt the experience will wash completely off me. But I will rub and scrub with the harshest of detergents and hope the cleansing chemicals will somehow save me instead of causing a more deadly cancer to grow. But after reading two-thirds of this I cannot imagine what that could be.

Neula says

One of my pet annoyances is writers who say: "oh, I just start writing and my characters get up to the most unexpected things all on their own, I just let it happen!"

What that translates as is: "I don't have a plot to speak of or any structure but I have such faith in my own vast (albeit undiscovered talent) that I don't feel I need one, so I simply write pages and pages of free-flowing pure invention [tedious drivel] instead."

Slow Man is what happens when you let your characters write the book for you. NOTHING. They fanny around, make a cup of tea, think about some irrelevant stuff and then sink back onto the sofa in a slough of despond. Halfway through the book the situation becomes so desperate that you introduce a meta-fictional alter-ego writer character to prod them along (at which point your readers politely applaud how clever you are) but by this point its too late and you can only write a book about how characters don't really do anything when left to their own devices.

If you're an exceptionally brilliant Nobel-prize-winning writer you might just get away with it but if not I'd recommend one of those 'what's your character's arc?' worksheets. They're really rather helpful.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

4. Slow man, J.M. Coetzee, c2005?

Slow Man is a 2005 novel by South African-born Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee, and concerns a man who must learn to adapt after losing a leg in a road accident. The novel has many varied themes, including the nature of care, the relationship between an author and his characters, and man's drive to leave a legacy.

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Fabian says

Fourth Coetzee book I've read: what makes this possible, not getting bored by the same author's voice while reading Coetzee all summer long, is his outstanding talent for making the novel readable. All four novels I've read ("Disgrace," "Elizabeth Costello," "Life and Times of Michael K.," this, & currently a fifth classic: "Waiting for the Barbarians") are distinctly different from each other, and this being his most current (perhaps there is a newer?) it has the figure of the lonely fallen man ("Disgrace") making sense of a new way of life; in this instance it is a grown man, newly amputated, slow and immobile, who takes center stage. More so than "Elizabeth Costello" (that Nobel-prize-worthy novel, and my favorite of Coetzee's), the taking over of the protagonist's psyche is so complete that growing paranoid was never before perceived to be this much fun. The reader's sensibilities are likewise Paul's, & they both go mad together. Also taking contemporary issues (the social boiling pot that is South Africa; the differences in cultures, customs and lives) he does yet another masterful genre-splice: the tricky postmodern Murakami-meets-Saramago turn: Elizabeth Costello's (the writer's) strange presence in this (his next) novel...! Is it me or was the question set forth "What happens when the character in a plot meets its writer/creator?" (Plenty of modern masters have tried to set a foot in Borges's metafictional terrain.)

"Slow Man"'s awkward but shocking finale sets the record straight: This novelist can do it all...!

Vladislav Radak says

Kuci još jednom zakucava, drže?i se svojih teritorija (on je pasionirani biciklista koji bicikl koristi kao glavno prevozno sredstvo) te svi oni koji sate provode na dvoto?kašu znaju da ?oveku svakakve budalaštine padnu na pamet pa otud i ideje za ovaj roman, pretpostavljam. Kuci istražuje misterioznu, uro?enu potrebu ?oveka za porodicom, protekcionjom iste, drže?i se koloseka koji su njemu kao piscu svojstveni, usamljenost, požuda, istraživanje granica sramote i poniženja, sukob razli?itih kultura su samo neki od poteza ?etkicom kojima slika ovu kompleksnu društvenu minijaturu.

Neki od likova su isiljeni i redundantni, kao lik Elizabet Kostelo koju je pozajmio iz sopstvenog romana istog naziva. Njena psihologija cupka u mestu, njeni stavovi su protivure?ni stavovima iz njenog romana (njen feminizam dobita notu agresivnosti koja koketira sa bizarnim). Vredno ?itanja, ali još više diskusije i razmišljanja o prolaznosti života...

Anna says

At the outset, I thought I was going to love this book, as I liked the author's writing style. Being 61 myself however, I got a little tired of his emphasis on how old a man he was. Please, 60 is not that old. Likely though, with the character being suddenly disabled, he likely felt that way, and that was probably the point. I found that as the book went on(and on and on) I got a bit tired of his whining and self absorption, and was just wanting the book to be finished.

Elizabeth was an odd addition to the book, I couldn't quite figure out whether she was an angel of sorts or what; it was all a bit confusing. In real life it would be very disconcerting, of course, to encounter a person who could read your very mind. In this book, perhaps she served to make him more aware of things, as mirror as it were, to make him face himself and his attitudes. Interesting that he covers his bathroom mirror, so as not to see the reflection of his physicality.

Also, I was not fond of the sexual encounter with the blind girl. Perhaps I am not sophisticated enough, in the world of literature, to understand the function of that little tryst. It did not seem to serve any purpose in the story, it was brief and there certainly wasn't even a hint of eroticism to the account of the act itself. It could have been cut from the book and never even missed, in my opinion.

Then it ended, abruptly and in my opinion, unsatisfactorily. I am not sure what I expected, but I thought, "What, that's it?" Generally, I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone. All in all, I found it depressing and that it did not have any redeeming features.

Sawsan says

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