

Writing Slowness in J. M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*

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How to cite this paper: Komenan, C. (2019). Writing Slowness in J. M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*. *Advances in Literary Study*, 7, 176-192.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2019.74012>

Received: July 22, 2019

Accepted: October 11, 2019

Published: October 14, 2019

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Abstract

Using literary semiotics and narratology as the only criteria, and starting from the hypothesis according to which J. M. Coetzee writes slowness in *Slow Man*, the article shows how *Slow Man* is made weighty, and why it evolves sluggishly. With an actant character saddled with the epithet “Slow Man”, a designation embodying slowness, *Slow Man* claims to be a slow novel generated by retardation devices like speech acts narrative, polyglotism, fragmentation, epistolarity, and narrative embeddedness. Those roadblocks prevent flashy reading, promote “slow reading”, a leisurely and innovative reading by which the reader is brought to become a textual cooperater in the actualization process of *Slow Man*'s meaning.

Keywords

Actantial Schema, Characterization, Coetzee, Fragmentation, Genette, Greimas, Hybridity, Language and Style, Narrative, Narrative Speed, Narratology, Novel, Retardation Devices, Scriptural Slowness, Semiotics, Write, Writable Text

1. Introduction

In *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*, Honoré (2004) inspired the development of “A Manifesto for Slow Writing”, a movement postulating that “the time for haste is over [and that the slow writer should] embrace a more authentic way of writing and of being a writer.” (BOOKFOX, 2018). Answering Honoré's call, Coetzee (2006) wrote *Slow Man*, a novel in which he claims to be a “slow writer” concerned with “slow writing” and “slow reading”. In *Slow Man*, characterization, technique, language and style are so closely connected that it could be hypothesized that they are used as ploys for writing slowness. This hypothesis leads the reader to wonder about the whys and wherefores of such a scripture. Before reflecting on the issue, it would be useful to define the words “writing” and “slowness”.

Whereas “writing” makes reference to “the verbal representation” of the story, the “fictional act of language” (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2016), “slowness” refers to the slow speed at which the main character leads his life, and also to the slow pace at which the printed text evolves. Put differently, “slowness” alludes to the length of the prose. Thanks to literary semiotics theorized as a science of signs meant to make meaning in a given written text, and narratology understood “as a field of study [...] look[ing] at the internal mechanisms of narrative, the form taken by a narrated story” (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2016), the extent to which *Slow Man* is made lengthy, and the reason why it develops slowly will be proved. The study of the fictionalization of slowness in *Slow Man* falls into two parts. In the first section, while the epithet “Slow Man” depicts Paul Rayment as an actant character embodying slowness, in the second division, *Slow Man* is described and analyzed as a slow novel composed with retardation devices.

1.1. “Slow Man”, an Actant Character Embodying Slowness

Slow Man, the title of Coetzee’s novel, is suggestive of a designation in which Paul Rayment appears as a “Slow Man”, an actant character embodying slowness. Algirdas Julien Greimas’s actantial schema helps to better understand the actantial functions of Paul Rayment’s characterization as a “Slow Man”. The latter’s appellations, names, surnames, nicknames, and grammatical substitutes, will be zeroed in on in *Slow Man*, which is considered as a semiotic product encapsulating the main character’s doing. As a person in his sixties, Paul Rayment is an actant subject, a protagonist seeking an actant object, which is living the remaining of his life comfortably in Adelaide. But Paul Rayment’s legitimate quest for a happy old age is suddenly disturbed by a serious road accident which befalls him on Magill Road, and leads to the amputation of his right leg. These two unfortunate events are two major active actant opponents of the pleasant lifestyle, the secure and unworried existence Paul Rayment yearns for in his old age; they hinder the protagonist’s project about living a happy, active and comfortable old age. Those obstacles make him suffer the humiliation of being an amputee, a man who cannot do things for himself “without being *given a hand*” (p. 16), a “Slow Man”, an individual who is now forced to “get by in the world, more slowly than before” (p. 17). The use of “Slow Man” as a lazy and temporizing signifier by the reference subject observer (the narrator), offers a slowness actantial role to Paul Rayment, a slow “patient” (Bremond, 1993: p. 134), an actant subject undergoing the action in the novel. Belonging to Greimas’s actantial schema composed of the whole of roles (actants), and the relationships whose function is to narrate a story by act, the part (= role/character; place) of Paul Rayment as an actant character embodying retardation in Coetzee’s narrative, just as “Conan Doyle’s Dr. Watson [...] exists ‘to retard the action’” (Hume, 2005: p. 105), because of Sherlock Holmes’s close friend’s wounded right leg (Doyle, 2017), portrays the main character as a conscious sender and a non-receiver of his quest. Actually, if Paul Rayment is an “agent” (Bremond, 1993: p.

134), a deliberate actant sender who sends himself on a mission for completing a comforting existence on this earth, he is not an actant receiver, a character who benefits from the search since he fails to reach his goal on account of the cycling accident and the amputation. As a result, right from the initial situation where the disturbing force (the accident caused by Wayne Blight) takes place, Paul Rayment's vocation in life turns into an unaccomplished duty. His designation as "Slow Man" which could be synonymous with "Decelerated Man", that is to say, a paper being with a reduced mobility, places him in a failed axis of transmission, which Greimas terms "axis of knowledge". Being in such a predicament, Paul Rayment the actant sender fully knows that he has not been able to establish a junction between the actant subject (himself) and the actant object; in other words, Paul Rayment fails to ask Paul Rayment to be "on the threshold of a comfortable old age" (novel's 4th cover); therefore, he will have to survive "more slowly than before", and that is the reason why he undergoes physiotherapy and hydrotherapy treatments which shed light on his physical slowness. The evidences of a disjunction about the axis of desire are shown in words like "get some rhythm" (p. 61), recapture physical potency, "dance" (p. 60), "balancing exercises" (p. 61), "the swaying-to-music" (p. 61), "hydrotherapy [...] water-work" (p. 61), and "In the narrow pool in the back room he grips the rails and walks in the water" (p. 61).

The aforementioned actants are passive helpers since they do not help Paul Rayment to fully regain his former potency. As a result, Paul Rayment is both an actant sender and a non-beneficiary actant receiver. Here, Paul Rayment holds concurrently two actantial functions since "Sender elements are often receiver elements as well" (Hébert, 2011). The verbal syntagm "walks in the water" shows that the "rhythm" being mentioned is not a steady one, but rather a slow pace revealing Paul Rayment's "limited mobility" (p. 153), his physical disability making him into a true actant character portrayed as an epitome of slowness. With reduced motor functions, Paul Rayment places himself on a negative axis of power; this is evidenced by such passive actant opponents as the following: He "cannot skate, cannot dance, cannot walk, cannot even stand up straight unaided" (p. 60). Consequently, the physiotherapeutic and hydrotherapeutic exercises which are done with slow, rhythmic movements are positive powers and passive actant helpers. The word "hydrotherapy" associated to Paul Rayment's physical re-education not only makes the reader to understand that the motion of the unhealthy protagonist in water is naturally slower than the latter's displacement on the ground, but also reveals that Paul Rayment cannot succeed in the Greimassian theory of "three tests (QDG): "1. Qualifying; 2. Decisive; and 3. Glorifying" (Taha, 2015: p. 91). Actually, with a reduced and slow mobility, Paul Rayment can be said to have lacked sufficient amount of ability at the physical level; as a result, the Qualifying stage is a fiasco; the same would hold true for the Decisive and Glorifying tests since the action (cycling on Magill Road on an errand) undertaken has not allowed him to reach the desired actant object; and the

outcome of Paul Rayment's performance is not success but rather failure. The non-fulfilment, the disjunction between the actant subject and the actant object is further described through such passive actant opponents as "tortoise character" (p. 228), "call me a tortoise" (p. 228), "your tortoise character" (p. 228), "tortoise variety of passion" (p. 228), and "you are slow as a tortoise" (p. 235), "Broken Down Man", a "Tortoise Man", "half man", "The man with the missing leg" (p. 95), "the crippled" (p. 68), "the truncated haunch" (p. 109), "the halt" (p. 111), "a man with one leg" (p. 113), "a lesser man" (p. 113), "a lesser being[s]" (p. 113), a "handicapped" (p. 113), a "diminished" (p. 113), a "humiliated" man, and "a hobbler" (p. 198). Those "figurative notations" (Greimas, 1973: p. 174), the protagonist is saddled with are phrasal extensions proving that Paul Rayment's life really is the embodiment of slowness. With such an existence, it could be said that Paul Rayment has gone down into the underworld. This descent into hell is caused by such an active actant opponent as "*real bad driving*" (p. 20), "a car going at speed" (p. 6), that is to say (Wayne) Blight's car's neck-breaking speed which has slowed down and shattered Paul Rayment's life, thereby making him into a man with "a leg amputated" (p. 38), "a shadow of himself" (p. 139), "an amputee" (p. 38), a "crippled or [an] infirm" (p. 23), "A man not wholly a man [...] an after-man" (pp. 33-34). Here, the "discontinuous signifier" (Hamon, 1997: p. 142) "Blight", the name of the young bad driver who hits Paul Rayment violently, takes its full significance because "Blight", as a substantive, refers to the phrase "to blight", a verb meaning "to spoil", "to damage" something, by creating many troubles. In point of fact, as a non-actant helper and an unconscious actant opponent, Blight has unavoidably and unintentionally destroyed Paul Rayment's life by making him into a "Slow Man", a "Circumscribed Man", a man confined first to hospital, and then to his home, as expressed in the following: "Wayne [...] **Blight** [...] roaring up from behind to **blight** his life and land him first in hospital and then back in this flat with its inconvenient stairs." (p. 81). Put differently, because of an imprisoned life due to the loss of "the freedom of movement" (p. 25), and because of isolation from his contacts and acquaintances, Paul Rayment has become an "Isolated Man", a "Robinson Crusoe" (p. 14), an "Island Man" whose plight shows that "*man [can be] an island*" (Coetzee, 2003: p. 3). Another passive actant opponent of Paul Rayment's quest appears in onomastic fragmentation, a consequence of physical fragmentariness and slowness.

Paul Rayment's reduced mobility and existence bring about a fragmented, a restricted denomination, an orthographic "denaturalization/defamiliarization" (Chandler, 1994), a semiotic concept expressing the main character's nominal destabilization. This change from "natural" being into "unnatural", "denaturalized", "defamiliarized" paper being is perceived through such words as "*Mr R*" (p. 18), and "*P R*" (p. 122); "R" and "P R" being letters used to refer to Paul Rayment. Whereas "R" stands for "Rayment", "P R" means "Paul Rayment". Letters like "a", "y", "m", "e", "n" and "t" in the protagonist's family name

(“Rayment”), and “a”, “u”, and “l” in his first name (“Paul”), have been left out, thereby creating an alphabetical ellipsis which is synonymous with identity “death”, the nullification of P R’s identification. Like the extremely reduced physical movability marked by a hyper-slowness, a hyper-deceleration on account of a hyper-heaviness of the new body, the particulars, that is, the written information and details about the identity of the protagonist, have been “truncated”, fragmented and voided. As a matter of fact, the main character’s appellation is voided of the letters allowing to recognize and identify him. Both his family and Christian names undergo an “estrangement”, that is, their familiar feature is made strange, a way in which the reader is invited to pay attention to the metamorphosis of this actant subject, actant sender, and non-actant receiver whose amputated body becomes an actant opponent of his social and physical well-being because of its heaviness and slowness. Here, Paul Rayment holds concurrently several semiotic functions which generate an actantial syncretism where the mixture of different actants makes him not into an “agent” who overcomes the trials and tribulations of life, but rather into a “patient” who endures the most terrible humiliations like Michael K, Coetzee’s main character in *Life & Times of Michael K* (Coetzee, 1983). Like K, P R the slow actant character has lost the dignity, the substance, the importance and the good health he enjoyed before the accident and the amputation; because of a disability that makes him to become a slow protagonist, P R is not in full possession of his faculties; he has become insignificant, “void and without form” (p. 228); he is now a shapeless non-actant character that does not “live like a hero” (p. 229), a principal who is not a “Don Quixote [...] to do great deeds.” (pp. 228-229). P R’s construction as a “Slow Man”, a “Fragmented Man”, an anti-hero contradicts Elizabeth Costello’s argument that desire is “what makes the world go round” (p. 228), and also Peter Brooks’s view that passion is “the motor of narrative” (Brooks, 1984: p. 52). By his fragmentation P R does not embody passion that leads to action and proaction. As a helpless, a reactive, and not a proactive actant character, P R’s predicament is similar to K’s plight. Indeed, P R and K are very much alike not only because of their physical and patronymic fragmentations (P R’s bodily and nominal amputations; and K’s hare-lip, his titular truncation), but also because both characters are marked by slowness, a great handicap. All in all, “Slow Man”, P R’s “signifying etiquette” (Hamon, 1997: p. 144), as well as the numerous aforementioned temporizing designations, portrays him as an anthropomorphous actant whose existence is the incarnation of slowness. A “Slow Man” in *Slow Man*, P R’s leisurely and sluggish characterization takes place in a slow prose text, a novel composed with retardation devices.

1.2. A Slow Novel Composed with Retardation Devices

Like P R the “Slow Man”, *Slow Man* has become a “Slow Novel”, a prose text retarded and made to evolve in a sluggish manner, as shown in the characters’ recursive monologues, dialogues and conversations. The great number of mono-

logues, dialogues and conversations account for the slowness, the length of *Slow Man* where monologues, dialogues and conversations are narrated, and where the narration of “events” appears to be insignificant. Unlike P R’s “circumscribed life”, the narrative is not shortened. On the contrary, P R’s multiple monologues, the numerous dialogues and the various conversations he has with characters like Marijana, Elizabeth Costello, Drago, and Marianna, lengthen *Slow Man*, which is made to unfold in a piecemeal, slow rhythm. Indeed, right from the start of the novel, P R’s words to himself are revealed to the reader in the following: “*Relax!* he tells himself as he flies through the air (*flies through the air with the greatest of ease!*)” (p. 1), and also “*Like a cat* he tells himself: *roll, then spring to your feet, ready for what comes next.*” (p. 1) Such soliloquies can be seen on pages 4, 12, 105, 107, 112, and 117, to name but a few. Added to them, are the vast and multifarious dialogues and conversations between P R and the other characters, either in his flat or outside his apartment. For example, the dialogues between P R and Dr Hansen (pp. 5, 7, 8), Mrs Doriane Putts and P R (pp. 17, 18), St Paul and P R in the afterlife (p. 34), P R and Drago (pp. 67, 68, 69, 70), P R and Marianna (pp. 104, 105, 106, 109, 110, 111), P R and Marijana (pp. 123-124), P R and Elizabeth Costello (pp. 125-126); PR and Mr Jokic (pp. 143, 145, 147); P R’s conversations with Elizabeth Costello and Marijana (p. 126), with Marijana and Ljuba (p. 127), with Drago and Elizabeth Costello (pp. 134, 135, 137, 139, 141, 142).

The great number of monologues, dialogues and conversations suggests that what Coetzee is dealing with is a “narrative of words” (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2016), a prose of “monologues, dialogues and conversations”, a kind of discourse quoted verbatim by the narrator, and which reveals that what is at stake is not event, action, activeness (P R’s former active life), but rather inaction, inactivity, passiveness and extreme slowness bordering on immobility. That is why, the central theme of *Slow Man* is considered to be its “lack of movement”, its “lack of urgency”, its “uninterestingness” (Craig, 2014: p. 4). What is being shown is that the main character’s “circumscribed life” and physical slowness are tantamount to “vain paroles” or “unproductive discourses”, since nothing concrete, no meaningful events and actions happen in his “new life”; the words become synonymous with procrastination, that is, delaying doing things that should be done, inaction, immobilization and impotence in the face of the vicissitudes of life. From the beginning of *Slow Man*, marked by the accident on Magill Road, the admittance to the hospital and the amputation of PR’s right leg, to the closure of the novel, no significant events happen. The countless monologues, dialogues and conversations between P R and the other characters, either about PR’s plight or about subject matters having nothing to do with the protagonist’s bodily decline, are (ir)relevant and digressive utterances which are used to fill out the 263 pages of the narrative. As scriptural fillers, they make the novel into a “lazy machine” (Eco, 1985: p. 29), by fleshing it, by increasing its length, its heaviness and its thickness. As a matter of fact, since the dialogues, monologues

and conversations between PR and the other characters are thoroughly narrated instead of being summarized, *Slow Man* becomes lengthy. The amount of words used to verbalize the narrative is so much increased that the pages telling P R's tale multiply and make the text drag on. Representing preponderant loci revealing characters' emotions, thoughts and deeds, the speech acts retard the fiction, just like the cinematic technique of slow motion shows important actions at a much slower speed than it happened in real life. The verbatim enunciations in *Slow Man* are all the more important as "[they] contain all of the novel's interesting and exciting and dramatic material" (Chapman, 2008), by which they are displayed conspicuously in order to bring about textual retardation.

By their frequent occurrence and recurrence, the scenic sections punctuate the prose text, thus preventing it from evolving smoothly. Like a P R who belongs now to the class of the halt and the lame, and who is a "halt" by dint of being slower, the prose text has come to a "halt", since its progression has become extremely slow due to scores of speeches. So, *Slow Man* itself becomes a "halting novel", a narrative stopping and starting often because of characters' frequent monologued, dialogued and conversed "scenes" composed of characters' direct discourses or reflexions. According to Genette, the monologues, the dialogues, and the conversations totalize a duration which equals the Story-Time: "Narrative-Time = Story-Time". Yet, since *Slow Man* is lacking in events, the Story-Time could be deemed nought, which means that Narrative-Time or yet again Discourse-Temporality is of utmost importance. In other words, the textual length telling P R's story prevails over the time of the signified, the time of fiction. Words from the narrated discourse could be counted and quantified to prove that Coetzee's work is a verbose text covering 30 chapters penned in 263 pages. Like the monologic, dialogic and conversational decelerators, multilingualism, fragmentation and letter writing appear as other delaying ploys by which Coetzee's novel is made to evolve at a snail's pace.

Slow Man is not a monolingual prose text, that is, a literary work written exclusively in English. It is rather a multilingual novel penned in several languages of which purpose is to retard the pace at which the printed text evolves. In other terms, multilingualism becomes a reducer of narrative speed. As a matter of fact, appearing through such languages as French, Latin, Croatian, Russian, and Spanish in the text printed in English, multilingualism creates linguistic fractures which stop the steady, uninterrupted speed of the narrative. Examples in French are legion, but four groups of illustrations will be listed to allow the reader to measure their omnipresence in Coetzee's work. First, such terms as "*Laissez faire!*" (p. 2), "*temps*" (p. 24), "*le jambon*" (p. 29), "**Aimée** or, even better, **Amour**" (p. 30), "*his joie de vivre*" (p. 41), "*Bon, je m'en occupe*" (p. 44), "*faute de mieux*" (p. 51), "*Infidèle Europe*" (p. 66), "*the pièces de résistance*" (p. 86), can be mentioned. Second, other French words like in the following "But *chacun ses goûts*, I suppose" (p. 152), "For there is a *blessure* in my heart" (p. 155), "a heart case, *un cardiaque*" (p. 165), "Marijana and I, to have our little *contre-*

temps” (p. 184), “the *tristesse* that descends after” (p. 112), “*Sale vipère*, those are his words” (p. 194), “*formation*” (p. 196), “*métier*” (p. 196), “the *Kangourous*” (p. 196), “the best *copains*” (p. 196), “my core, *mon Coeur*” (p. 198), could also be quoted as good instances of the integration of Molière’s language into Shakespeare’s tongue. Third, another series of French words and expressions like in these “a book called *Légendes dorées*, Golden Legends” (p. 129), “I sing *Frères Jacques*” (p. 231), “I’ll be your best *copine*, the *copine* of your last days” (p. 234), “on home ground, *chez elle?*” (p. 239), “*Allez, les enfants, soyez sages!*” (p. 240), “*Toujours pressés, pressés!*” he would say in his grating Dutch voice” (p. 240), “*Ils sont fous! Ils gaspillent l’essence, c’est tout!*” (p. 240), “to *gaspiller* his own *essence* for anybody” (p. 240), “*Oh la la, ils gaspillent de l’essence!*” (p. 240), “*Merde, merde, merde!*” (p. 240), and “*Renault, l’auto la plus économique*, he would enounce [...]” (p. 241). Fourth, one last set of French words includes the following: “But they are not called *deux chevaux*. *Deux chevaux* is something else” (p. 262), and “We can ask Miroslav to fix a couple of *chevaux* to it” (p. 26). As far as Russian, Dutch, Latin, Croatian, and Spanish languages are concerned, the following good exemplifications can be enumerated: “Ljuba, Ljubica” (p. 30), “*Iyubov* means love” (p. 30) (Russian); “*Paul Rayment: canis infelix. Marianna Popova: pseudocaeca (migratory)*” (p. 117) (**Latin**), “*Felix, felix. Felix lapsus*” (p. 187) (**Latin**), “the motto *Malleus maleficorum* [...] *Malleus maleficorum*. Excellent [...] *Malleus maleficorum* for me [...]” (p. 263) (**Latin**); “*Sto to radis, mama* [...] *Mama* is nurse, remember” (pp. 187-188) (**Croatian**), “the verb to love, *ljub* or whatever” (p. 251) (**Croatian**), and “In Croatia we say *ovaj glum!*” (p. 251) (**Croatian**).

As shown in the aforementioned enumerations, languages other than English are so recurrent and omnipresent in *Slow Man* that the reader may wonder how French, Dutch, Russian, Latin, Spanish and Croatian can slow down Coetzee’s fiction. They fulfil the function of narrative retardation by increasing the number of words in which the narrative is written and by creating recursive constructions and linguistic impurity or what Shklovsky terms “repetitive structures” and “defamiliarization”. Actually, the recurrence of these terms and their explicit English translations, like in the examples (“*Deux chevaux*, two horses” (p. 262), “I repent, I repent me, *je me repens*, and bitterly too” (p. 34) (**French**), “*Trouw*, faith, fidelity” (p. 66) (**Dutch**), “The dark heart, *el oscuro corazon*” (p. 157) (**Spanish**), and finally “*Zaboga, Zar opet!* [...] His hair is caught!” (p. 252) (**Croatian**)), augment the amount of words, lines, and pages in which the whole narrative is penned. For a novel whose plot is constructed around slowness happening in the protagonist’s flat (26 chapters out of 30 chapters are devoted to P R’s reduced mobility and his confinement to his apartment), it is no wonder that *Slow Man* is composed in 263 pages. If the vocables in French, Russian, Dutch, Latin, Croatian, and Spanish increase the length of the narrative and make it drag slowly, then their cancellations may considerably reduce the number of lines and pages in which *Slow Man* is narrated, and therefore may speed it

up and bring it to a close in less than 263 pages. As a scriptural specificity of Coetzee's *Slow Man*, multilingualism is pregnant with meaning when the reader takes into account the fact that *Slow Man* is composed of 263 pages divided into 30 chapters, and that 26 chapters out of 30 are devoted to P R's indoor life, whereas only 4 chapters reveal P R's outdoor activities. The dedication of 26 chapters to P R's "circumscribed life" proves that P R has become a forced homebody, a lame man imprisoned in his own flat. Like a P R made physically handicapped and kept prisoner at home, the English in *Slow Man* is disabled, defamiliarized, made impure since it is diluted with French, Dutch, Spanish, Croatian, Latin and Russian. But, by the same token, it is constrained to coexist with other languages which make it unwieldy and unable to progress smoothly. In fact, English is delayed because it is engulfed by the recurrent multilingual systems and their various terminological and semantic interruptions. At this juncture, Coetzee's philosophy of "slow reading" and Eco's science of "textual cooperation" (Eco, 1979: p. 7), which is required from the "Model Reader", become meaningful. In fact, mixed with English, these odd languages delay the reading of *Slow Man* because they bring the reader who is not a polyglot to stop the reading in order to look up their meanings in bilingual dictionaries. By behaving not like an "Empirical Reader", but rather like a "Model Reader", the receiver practices slow reading, a cooperative and participative reading by which he or she contributes to the meaning making process. As can be observed, multilingualism is a decelerator which forces the narratee to read Coetzee's prose slowly, carefully and attentively in order to avoid misinterpretation, what Eco names "overinterpretation" (Guillemette and Cossette, 2006). Another retardation device, causing narrative slowness, is fragmentation.

Fragmentation is a retarding technique which slows down the speed of the narrative because it makes it ductile, that is, it lengthens it. Scores of examples could be mentioned to illustrate the connection between fragmentation, textual length and scriptural slowness in *Slow Man*. In a good example like "To her he must be even more of a jumble of sense-data: the cold of his hands; the roughness of his skin; the rasp of his voice; and an odour probably unpleasing to her supersensitive nostrils" (pp. 106-107), the semi-colons (;) fulfil fragmentary and temporizing functions by generating an enunciation composed of many broken components, which boost the words in which the excerpt is written. Like P R the fragmented and "Slow Man", the narrative becomes fragmentary, lengthy and unhurried. The semi-colon is not the unique typographical means used to break the text into many tiny bits. The full stop (.) also plays fragmentary and delaying roles. Instances like "Because Marianna does not want you to see her. She insists. Here, bend down. Keep still. Don't blink" (p. 102), "Goodbye. Do not worry about me. I'm a tough old bird" (p. 102), and "Big breasts, a big bottom, yet slight for the rest. Marianna. Who is here, says the Costello woman [...]" (p. 106), show how the full stop (.), as a punctuation mark, works as a fragmentary tool by revealing the way in which the sentences are broken into many pieces. In

the first example, the second sentence (“She insists.”), the fourth sentence (“Keep still.”), and the fifth sentence (“Don’t blink”) are made up of two words describing Elizabeth Costello’s actions and orders given to P R. In fact, the segmentation of sentences into many small broken pieces standing either in two words or in one term like in examples two (“Goodbye.”), and three (“Marianna.”), increases the number of words and makes the prose very long in size. As a result, the narrative drags and fails to draw to a close. Another example can be found in the following: “*He* waits. *He* tarries. *He* delays.” (p. 111) Instead of describing the actions of “waiting”, “tarrying” and “delaying” in only one sentence, three “sentences”, which are made up of two words and punctuated by three full stops, are built up, thereby creating a repetition of the subject pronoun “*He*”, and causing a terminological multiplication. An instance like “But more likely it is because of *our. Our record, yours and mine*” (p. 177), in which the full stop stops the first utterance abruptly by making it into a meaningless sentence (“But more likely it is because of *our*.”), what is being shown is not meaning, but rather padding or yet again replenishing, that is, (re)filling the text, or writing for writing’s sake, that is, writing for filling out the pages. John Barth refers to this form of fiction writing as “The Literature of Replenishment” (Barth, 1984: p. 199). For Barth, as well as for Coetzee, “ordinary content” (Barth, 1984: p. 199), common subject matter does not matter; what is important is “form”, which materializes by “language and technique”. By the fragmentary and technical wording, *Slow Man* is made into a novel which is interested not in the “adventure of a hero”, but rather in “writing adventure” (Ricardou, 1967: p. 111). It is only in the second sentence (“*Our record, yours and mine*”), that the sense of “*our*” becomes clearer with the terms “*Our [+] record*”. If Coetzee were not interested in fragmentary writing which multiplies words in order to lengthen his narrative and make it evolve slowly, he would have joined the two aforementioned sentences into one sentence: “But more likely it is because of *Our record, yours and mine*”. In that case, the term “*our*” would have been used once and its meaning would have been more understandable. The abrupt interruption of the first sentence by the use of a full stop causes a multiplication of the possessive pronoun (“... *our. Our...*”), which means that repetition, fragmentation, lengthiness and slowness are connected. By resorting to a fragmentary, multiplicative and retarding style, Coetzee proves, not only that that he is an authentic writer concerned with “genuine” novel writing based on a specific “way of speaking” (Barth, 1984: p. 199), that is, the particular style with which he writes, but also that “... the whole of literature, from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematics of language.” (Barthes, quoted in Barth, 1984: p. 199). Consequently, the ““telegraphic style”” (Kern, 2003: p. 115), which obtains acclaim in Hemingway’s writing, and which consists in removing useless terms from the text, does not thrill Coetzee. A recourse to an economical approach to fiction writing, could prevent Coetzee from coming up with a novel penned at great length, a prose text of great prolixity. The author’s “respect [for] language [and]—all its possibilities, history, and

connotations”, dissuades him from being a “fast writer who uses language in a utilitarian manner,” for he is supposed to be a slow writer, a novelist who “prizes the texture of language, and all the richness that creates language.” A “Model Reader” reading *Slow Man* reads it (very) slowly, because he needs to take time in order to pay heed to the functions of the language. The latter makes “the text’s intention” and “the author’s intention” go hand in hand. A novel whose inner-workings (perceived in “the text’s intention”) are contaminated by slowness can but be intended to be read slowly, which is Coetzee’s intention (the significations promoted in the text). Finally, it is only by being a slow reader, a “Model Reader”, that the potential receiver can fully cooperate in the “actualization” (= semiotical assessment) of the signification of Coetzee’s prose text, that is comprehend its meaning. Letter writing is part of Coetzee’s “strings of delaying devices”.

Integrated into the novel, the archetext letter creates a mixture of genres, and defamiliarizes the prose text which becomes heterogeneous, bastardized and handicapped, just like PR is amputated, fragmented and disabled. Terms like “He sits down to write a letter. *Dear Marijana*, he *writes* [...]” (p. 79), “*Dear Miroslav*, he *writes* [...]” (pp. 223-224), and “*Yours ever, Paul Rayment*” (p. 166), attest to the fact that letter writing is at work in *Slow Man*. If the letter starts with an opening formula like “*Dear*”, it is with such a closing formula as “*Yours ever*” that it closes, with the protagonist’s signature “*Paul Rayment*”. The incorporation of letters into *Slow Man* makes it into an epistolary novel, a slow fiction. Indeed, the letter can be viewed as a symbol of slowness since its use is synonymous with administrative delays. Posting a letter means that much time will be needed for it to reach the addressee whose reply will also be delaying. Like P R the “Slow Man, the “Slow Protagonist”, *Slow Man* becomes a “Slow Narrative”. Just as the letters being sent by P R, either to Marijana or to her husband (Miroslav Jokic), will be taking too long to reach the people that they are addressed to, and too much time for the latter to answer back, as expressed in Elizabeth Costello’s words to P R (“A letter! Another letter! [...] Two days for your word to reach Marijana, two days for her word to come back: we will all expire of boredom before we have a resolution. This is not the age of the epistolary novel, Paul”) (p. 227), so too *Slow Man* evolves at a snail’s pace. The postal slowness has contaminated *Slow Man*, which has become an “epistolary novel” unfolding slowly, and taking plenty of time to come to a close. Elizabeth Costello’s word “boredom” may suggest that the “Fast Reader”, the “Empirical Reader”, who might not appropriately understand the philosophical signification of the text could feel tired and impatient, when faced with the extreme slowness with which the novel evolves. For such a reader, *Slow Man* is a boring novel, a “narrative [which] is dull.” (Craig, 2014: p. 1) Held in her review of *Slow Man*, Francine Prose’s terms, “from impatience to a dull rage to a sort of despairing boredom” (Prose, 2005), allude to the dullness felt by the “Fast Reader”. Like a P R put off by “the colourless, odourless, inert, and depressive gas given off by

[the] pages” (p. 120), while reading Elizabeth Costello’s *The Fiery Furnace* at the Adelaide public library, a non-model reader reading *Slow Man* may find it unappealing and may not provide a successful “actualization” of the meaning of Coetzee’s work. It is only a model reading practice, that is, a slow reading implementation that can help the receiver to grasp the profound sense of *Slow Man*’s multilingual, fragmentary and epistolary decelerations. Other slowing down techniques by which the narrative dawdles are indisputably flashbacks and multiplication of stories.

Introduced by terms like “In the old days, the days before the accident, he [P R] [...] took out books from the libraries, he went to the cinema; he cooked for himself [...] rode a bicycle or walked” (p. 25), “Years ago, after his divorce” (p. 37), “As a child, he remembers, he was told the story of a woman [...]” (p. 55), “In the books that his mother used to order from Paris when he was still a child [...]” (p. 76), and “His mind goes back to his childhood, to Ballarat [...]” (p. 239), the flashbacks used in Coetzee’s work do not have any connection with the main story, that is, P R’s “circumscribed [and slow] life”. If the first flashback on page 25 describes P R’s active life before the accident, the second on page 37 informs the reader about PR’s love affair with Margaret McCord after his divorce with Henriette, his first wife. The third on page 55 is about a woman who accidentally “stuck a tiny sewing-needle into the palm of her hand [which] [...] climbed up the woman’s veins and [...] pierced her heart and killed her.” (p. 55) The fourth and the fifth are respectively about P R’s childhood in Ballarat, where he remembered the “books that his mother would sigh over in the living-room in Ballarat where the shutters were always closed” (p. 76), and the unannounced visits to Andrea Mittiga, his stepfather’s friend. The five flashbacks mentioning the protagonist’s former active life, his ephemeral love affair with Margaret McCord, the story of the woman killed by a small sewing-needle inadvertently “stuck” into her palm, the sentimental stories his mother read and “sighed over”, and the unannounced visits to his stepfather’s friend, have nothing to do with P R’s current slow life. Consequently, they generate interruptions and digressions, that is, subjects about things that are not connected with the main tale being narrated. The deviation analepses draw the narrative backward whenever they occur; and by doing so, they delay the prose which is made to evolve slowly. In fact, they are delaying tactics deliberately used by Coetzee to defer the smooth evolvement of the novel of which storyline becomes anachronic, disordered, disorganized, and extendable. Flashbacks lead to excursus excerpts which are so innumerable that the end of the prose text is a long time coming. Removing such unrelated passages, could bring *Slow Man* to be written in less than 263 pages, and to unfold and draw to a close quickly. The aforementioned analepses equate with “pause”, Gérard Genette’s dilatory technique including the narrator’s descriptions and commentaries, because they create slow temporality, since the signifier’s time or yet again the time of the narrative discourse, which could be quantified by counting the number of unrelated sentences and paragraphs,

which makes the prose text longer. Here, it should be noted that Genette's theory "conceives of speed primarily as a ratio between the time span covered in the novel and the number of pages allotted to it [...]." (Genette, 1980: p. 92). Such a conception generates a quantification of narrative speed whereby textuality is mathematized. This stand is corroborated by Genette's mathematical formula written as follows: **NT (Narrative-Time) > ST (Story-Time)**; this simply means that what is prioritized is not the time of fiction, the time of the story being told, but rather the duration of the enunciation, the narrative time expressed in the number of pages written to tell P R's story. Like the analeptic decelerators making the novel flow slowly, multiplication of stories that do not relate retards *Slow Man*.

Any reader reading *Slow Man* could note that this novel is a prose composed of three stories. The main story is about P R's accident and his new life; the second is about Marijana and her family's story; the third is related to Elizabeth Costello's story about P R and Marianna, the blind girl. P R's tale, as the first story, the hypotext ("A-Text" or First-Text, according to Genette), triggers off Marianna and the protagonist's story, a second story which can be named hypertext ("B-Text" or Second-Text); both accounts have a "hypotextuality" and "hypertextuality" relationship (Escola, 1982); if the first can be referred to as a "hypostory", the second can be considered as a "hyperstory". It should be observed that the "hypostory" and the "hyperstory" are stories which are being written respectively by Coetzee and Elizabeth Costello, a famous female writer who is paying P R a visit. The narrator's terms like "the life-story [...] of Paul Rayment [...] [and] [...] Marianna Popova" (p. 118), and "Marianna [...] [an] entry for blindness" (p. 119), attest to the fact that, as two disabled people, Marianna and P R are a topic in Elizabeth Costello's publication. By using P R as a character in her fiction, Elizabeth Costello's "notebook" (pp. 121-122), about P R and Marianna transforms *Slow Man* into a metafiction, a metanarrative creating an interpretative relation with another fiction. Therefore, *Slow Man* is made weighty, lengthy and slow by the presence of another prose. On that account, while reading *Slow Man*, the reader reads two novels. P R's thoughts "Is this what it is like to be translated to what at present he can only call *the other side?*" (p. 122), "There is **a second world** that exists side by side with the first, unsuspected" (p. 122), and "one emerges into **a second world identical with the first**" (p. 122), underline the fact that the protagonist is aware that his "truncated state" and his reduced mobility are being used as a theme in Elizabeth Costello's "notebook". Such expressions as "*the other side?*", "**a second world** that exists side by side with the first", and "**a second world identical with the first**", prove that Elizabeth Costello's "notebook" about P R and Marianna is "*the other side*" (= "the other" book), the "**second world**" (= "the second book"), existing next to "the first" book (= *Slow Man*). With Elizabeth Costello's "notebook" existing "side by side with [*Slow Man* as] the first [book]", *Slow Man* can only unfold slowly because it contains not only "the first" story, a "hypostory", but also it

encapsulates “a second” story, a “hyperstory”, which lengthens it by considerably increasing the number of words, sentences and paragraphs in which it is penned. Meaning “more than normal”, “too much/many”, the prefix “hyper-” suggests an excessive number of things; so the term “hyperstory” reveals that *Slow Man*, which is composed of 30 chapters written in 263 pages, is long and its length makes it “a slow book” (Silvani, 2011: p. 135), that is, a slow narrative, a novel evolving in an abnormal way, like P R, the “Slow Man”, Coetzee’s “Slow Protagonist”, who drags himself along. Except the “hypostory” and the “hyperstory”, other types of stories which can be referred to as “microstories”, “nanostories” (=embedded/tiny stories), also increase the amount of writing in *Slow Man*, and indirectly the narrative time.

To exemplify P R’s ungratefulness towards Elizabeth Costello, whom the former rejects from his flat, the female writer tells the protagonist “the story of Sinbad and the old man” (pp. 128-129), a tale drawn from “*Légendes dorées, Golden Legends.*” (p. 129) In the story told by Elizabeth Costello, P R is compared with “the old man”, the ungrateful man, a character playing a bad role, which is dialectically suggested in the term “Sinbad”, “Sin” being “bad” from a religious perspective; and Elizabeth Costello herself bears comparison with “Sinbad”, a character playing a positive role, that is, doing P R a favour. Indeed, she has helped P R to rearm morally after the amputation, and to adapt to his new life, which brought him to declare his impossible love for Marijana. But like in “Mrs Costello’s story of the old man who turned Sinbad into his slave” (p. 164), P R has not been grateful to Elizabeth Costello, whom he has thrown away from his apartment. Other “nanostories” such as the story of P R’s life in France (p. 194), in which his love affairs with French girls are revealed (pp. 194-201), Elizabeth Costello’s story (p. 194), and the story about P R’s marriage (pp. 199-200), show that a multiplication of stories is displayed in *Slow Man*. For that reason, it develops slowly in the same way as P R walks sluggishly. As “strings of delaying devices”, these multiple stories can be viewed as “handicaps” preventing *Slow Man* from evolving normally to a close because they increase the reading time, and the signifier’s time by multiplying the number of words in which *Slow Man* is written.

Put on a drip by such retardation techniques as temporizing characterization, speech acts, fragmentation, epistolarization, retrospection and embedded tales, *Slow Man* could be compared with “sequoias [which] are slow enough.” (Pound, 1934: p. 596) Thus, the reader witnesses a scriptural perfusion by which Coetzee suggests a fiction promoter of slow writing and tardy reading. Exemplifying slow writing and sluggish reading, a novel like *Slow Man* should not be read quickly, that is, “Read for the Plot”, a surface-level component, but it should rather be read slowly, that is, “Read for the Form”, for the author’s “Style and Language”, a constituent plumbing the depths of the text. Put differently, unlike “speedy reading”, which “encourages rash decisions and ultimate failure” in the reading process, “slow reading”, which generates watchfulness, “serious consideration” (DeSalvo, 2014), causes efficient reading.

2. Conclusion

Thanks to such critical theories as semiotics and narratology, the concept of slowness has been analyzed in *Slow Man*, where P R has appeared as a “Slow Man”, an actantial character epitomizing slowness. His semiotic functions appear in an actantial syncretism whereby he is shown as an actant subject who has failed to reach the actant object (living his old age comfortably). An actant sender in his own quest for a peaceful and unworried old life, P R proves to be an actant “receiver” who does not benefit from the search; as a result, he is placed on a failed communication axis since the serious cycling accident and the amputation are active actant opponents preventing him from achieving his goal. He also falls into a negative power axis, as exemplified by the slothful and stalling epithet (“Slow Man”) expressing his inactive and negated living. Wayne Blight’s careful and slow driving could have been a passive actant helper in the achievement of the desired actant object.

Delaying and replenishing devices like soliloquies, dialogues, confabulations, multilingualism, fragmentation, letter writing, and multiplicity of stories appear as retardation ploys whereby the novel evolves slowly. Actually, negative actantial roles marked by a pathological slowness, direct discourse, polyglotism, fragmentariness, epistolarity, and “the framing of tales within tales” (Hume, 2005), are narrative slowdowns meant for slowing down the reading of *Slow Man*. In this way, Coetzee promotes “slow reading”, an “adventurous reading” (Defleaux, 1987: p. 152), an innovative reading in which the “readers [launch themselves] into a kind of self-reflective questioning” (Craig, 2014: p. 3). Triggered off by “slow writing”, “slow reading” is a “philosophical reading”, a critical reading in which the reader is invited to “philosophize” (Wilm, 2016), to contemplate the text, and to “actualize” its meaning by relishing Coetzee’s language and writing style, and above all, by avoiding hasty reading which might jeopardize “textual bliss”, the reader’s extreme enjoyment connected with the text’s “technical virtuosity” (Craig, 2014: p. 3). The latter stems from a “writerly”, “writable” textuality causing bliss that challenges the narratee, an active cooperator in the meaning-making process of the literary text (Barthes, 1975). Last but not least, a “Slow Writer” teaching “Slow Reading”, Coetzee attests to the truth of Pound’s terms positing that “Slowness is beauty” (Pound, 1934: p. 596), and shows that writing slowness in *Slow Man* amounts to proclaiming the aesthetic worth of “slow writing” and “slow reading”. Coetzee also invites people from the referential society to live slowly, “to slow down and sense something of the magic moments” (Cathcart, 2015), to soften their passions, as suggested in *The Age of Magic* (Okri, 2014). For example, they should avoid driving fast like Wayne Blight in order to eschew road accidents and their corollaries of mutilations and disabilities.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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