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J. M. COETZEE'S LITERATURE OF HOSPICE

Katherine Hallemeier

Near the end of J. M. Coetzee's fictionalized memoir *Summertime*, an undated fragment from the notes of the protagonist John Coetzee presents the character at a crossroads. A cancerous tumor is found on his father's larynx. After the prescribed laryngectomy, John perceives his father "like a corpse, the corpse of an old man" (262–63).¹ John's father is returned to his home by ambulance workers who provide a sheet of instructions before departing. In the fiction's closing lines John gradually realizes his father's care has become his responsibility: "It is not [the ambulance workers'] business, taking care of the wound, taking care of the patient. Their business is to convey the patient to his or her place of residence. After that it is the patient's business, or the patient's family's business, or else no one's business" (265). The protagonist resists the expectation that he must manage his father's health:

It used to be that he, John, had too little employment. Now that is about to change. Now he will have as much employment as he can handle, as much and more. He is going to have to abandon some of his personal projects and be a nurse. Alternatively, if he will not be a nurse, he must announce to his father: *I cannot face the prospect of ministering to you day and night. I am going to abandon you. Goodbye.* One or the other: there is no third way. (266)

The passage figures the prospect of caring for a father who is facing death as a crisis of both means and wants. The protagonist may

choose to pursue all of his "personal projects," including his nascent career in writing, or he may choose to enter the "business" of care. If care is to exist at all, it will exist as an act of attending to a "patient," one who is primarily conceived of in terms of his "wound." Such depersonalized care will be a form of "employment" that offers little or no remuneration and detracts from implicitly preferable occupations that are figured, in contrast to the parent-child relationship, as "personal." Economic logic usurps ethical language as John considers his need to care for a patient who is only addressed as his father during an imagined act of abandonment. Care will only manifest as routinized work, or it will be nonexistent. And yet, the hard but plaintive claim that there is "no third way" evokes the possibility of another form of care, even as this possibility is simultaneously denied.

John Coetzee as protagonist finds himself trapped in an economic logic that may be described as neoliberal by virtue of its investment in individual, privatized labor. Coetzee's fictions, in contrast, have resisted such logic, even as they acknowledge its conscious and unconscious penetration in public and private life.² Works from *Life & Times of Michael K* to *Age of Iron* to "The Old Woman and the Cats" have sought to imagine a third way of taking care that elides the dichotomy of management and abandonment that emerges when care is structured by neoliberal economic exigencies. In the coming pages, I attend to scenes of care for those who are aging, ill, and dying in Coetzee's fiction in order to describe how these scenes refigure the work of end-of-life care in light of specific ethical commitments that exceed those implicit to the logic of neoliberal governance, while still attending to how these logics delimit the practice of ethical standards.³ Even as Coetzee's work evokes an ideal of hospice that resonates with Derrida's conception of unconditional hospitality, it also attends to how this ideal is constrained by a global neoliberal regime that conceives of dying as a crisis to be managed. The practice of hospice that Coetzee's fiction envisions as both ethical and possible is distinctive for its critique of a discourse of crisis that promotes ongoing management, on the one hand, and laments the so-called necessity of abandonment, on the other. This practice, or third way, envisions both care for the dying and dying itself not only as precarious labor in a time of managed crisis but also as potentially unmanageable acts of creation.

Unconditional Hospitality and the Ethics of Hospice

The fictional John Coetzee asks whether and how he will care for his father. A broader question posed by *Summertime*, as it imagi-

natively traces how an author's life has affected the lives of others, is how its protagonist has ethically responded or failed to respond to others, including his father. The question of responsibility to others is recurrent in Coetzee's oeuvre, and it has led to compelling readings of the fiction's ethical commitments toward end-of-life care. Taking up the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas as developed by Jacques Derrida, scholars such as Mike Marais have proposed that Coetzee's work manifests an openness to singularity and difference, at once illustrating and enacting an ethics of unconditional hospitality whereby the self is given over to the other.⁴ As the close etymological relation between hospice and hospitality suggests, the discussion of unconditional hospitality in Coetzee's fiction provides a promising starting point for tracing how this fiction counters a neoliberal discourse of care characterized by depersonalized economic calculations.⁵

Marais begins such a tracing in a review article in which he suggestively argues that what he takes to be Coetzee's Derridean ethics of unconditional hospitality might be connected directly with the act of dying: "To the extent that unconditional hospitality is something that happens to one rather than something that one does, it is like dying. . . . Coetzee, in his fiction, suggests that we, in our relationship with the other, are always waiting to die" ("Versions" 170). Coetzee's fiction, proposes Marais, inaugurates the hospitable reception of the other, who cannot be controlled or foreseen. Such fictions dispossess the reader of subjectivity and thereby see that reader through what Marais describes as "a form of dying" (171). The fiction can in these terms be understood as a hospice for those who are transformed by an experience of radical alterity that characterizes both death and the other alike.

Building on Marais's insight that one might understand scenes and readings of unconditional hospitality in Coetzee's fiction as scenes and readings of hospice, one may inversely understand scenes of hospice in Coetzee's fiction in terms of an unconditional hospitality that exceeds economic exigency in its staging of responsibility to otherness.⁶ In *Age of Iron*, for example, the dying Elizabeth Curren comes to share her home with the homeless man Vercueil. The distinction between host and guest is overthrown as Elizabeth, who is biologically dying, also experiences a form of symbolic death insofar as she and her home are overwhelmed by Vercueil, her "Angel of Death" (Attwell 175). Unconditional hospitality is, for Elizabeth Curren, also a form of hospice, in which the person dying is as ethically implicated as the person who attends them. This unconditional hospice is incalculable in terms of economic exchange and labor, and it is not measured in terms of solace and sentiment. Vercueil's final embrace has "no warmth" (198). It is, however, through his agency in choos-

ing to deliver her written work that Elizabeth Curren's "truth"—the truth of her life and death—may "take on flesh" (130). To thus read hospice in relation to unconditional hospitality in Coetzee's work is to apprehend as ethically care-full moments when the other overwhelms and guides the self that focalizes narration, moments when the host becomes a stranger to herself. It also, following Marais, allows the possibility that this staging overwhelms the reader's intentionality and thereby transforms her relationship with the fiction and its world.

Reading scenes of hospice in Coetzee's work as an ethical staging of unconditional hospitality is clearly critically productive. A focus on the ethical potential of the literary work positions it as that which may valuably challenge neoliberal discourses that frame responsibility in terms of depersonalized management; we more clearly see how the literary work may actively contribute to the development of more responsible care. Indeed, the potential for literature of unconditional hospitality to affect hospice practices is evidenced by caregivers' contemporary attentiveness to this philosophy. For example, Ciro Augusto Floriani and Fermin Roland Schramm suggest that the work of Derrida and Levinas offers guidance for "an immense revitalization to the contemporary construction of a more robust ethos for a modern hospice movement" (218). Floriani and Schramm advocate for a "stripped down intentionality" or "unconditional state" as a means through which one may offer end-of-life care that responsibly acknowledges how "human beings each have their own way of manifesting their 'living-dying'" (217–18). The close association of unconditional hospitality with Coetzee's fiction distinguishes that fiction and its reading as a space in which such a nonnormative ethics of end-of-life care can be instantiated.

At the same time, reading hospice in Coetzee's work in light of an ethical ideal also requires doing full justice to the degree to which the fiction addresses the real impracticability of a hospice of unconditional hospitality. As my opening vignette from *Summertime* demonstrates, Coetzee's fiction closely attends to how neoliberal logic intimately structures daily relationships, including those relationships constituted through end-of-life care. In considering the third way of taking care that Coetzee's literature pursues, therefore, it is promising to consider not only the ethical standard proposed by his fictions but also how unconditional hospitality is only ever imperfectly staged in and by those fictions. For Derrida, as for Coetzee, the law of absolute unconditional hospitality is always expressed through conditional laws.⁷ Derrida suggests that the law of unconditional hospitality is "in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency" unless it is practiced through necessarily imperfect, conditional laws (23). Given a reading in which Coetzee's

literature aligns with Derrida's assertion of the necessity of conditional practice, a fuller consideration of hospice and hospitality in Coetzee's fiction must think through how its staging and inauguration of the ethical recognition of alterity can be understood as being in and of the world rather than transcendent of it.

The potential salutariness of this critical move is gestured to by Floriani and Schramm, as they consider briefly how the implementation and spread of "the possibility of unconditionality" in hospice care faces material "obstacles," ranging from the "routinization, medicalization, and distancing in the doctor-patient relationship" in "places which use high technology" to "the lack of material conditions, of suitable locations for care, and bad working conditions and precarious housing" that is found in "low-income countries" (219). While Coetzee's fiction can be understood as reflecting on our absolute ethical responsibility to others, and specifically to those who are dying and to those with whom we live as we die, it may also be understood as thinking through how material circumstances, including unequal access to technology, medicine, and housing, condition and shape the practice of such responsibility.

Biopolitics and the Crisis of Care

Elizabeth Curren is comparable to the fictional John Coetzee's father insofar as the care available to her is characterized by bureaucratization, management, and depersonalization. When Dr. Syfret gives her news of her cancer, he is reassuring: "'We will do everything we can,' he said, 'and we will tackle this together'" (4). The doctor's invocation of the collective pronoun is belied by his affect: "But already, behind the comradely front, I could see he was withdrawing. *Sauve qui peut* [Save yourself if you can]. His allegiance to the living, not the dying." From Dr. Syfret's perspective, Elizabeth withdraws from his care when she declines to "be in hospital getting proper attention" (183). "I was not aware that you still regarded yourself as under my care," he tells her. From Elizabeth's point of view, however, such managerial care is itself a kind of withdrawal.

Elizabeth's resistance to Dr. Syfret's attentions, like John Coetzee's balking at the prospect of working as a nurse for his father, demonstrates how the care available to white South Africans during apartheid (and after) is characterized by a regime in which the state and healthcare institutions allocate resources differently depending on demographic factors such as race, income, age, and family. John Coetzee's notebook fragments describe events in 1970s South Africa, and Elizabeth Curren inhabits a South Africa resonant with the 1980s,

when *Age of Iron* was written. Both texts, however, describe lives shaped by a state and global order of power that Michel Foucault has described as biopolitical. In a series of lectures delivered at the Collège de France in the mid- to late 1970s, Foucault described a gradual, world-historical transition away from a prohibitive, repressive power associated with preindustrial capitalist society and toward the consolidation of an inclusionary form of power, or biopower, associated with globalized capitalism.⁸ Within the biopolitical, Foucault contended, life itself is prioritized and managed in a "massifying" mode, even as human needs are reduced to abstract, measurable quantities (243). Coetzee's work, I argue, turns repeatedly to the ways in which biopower affects the potential for responsible end-of-life care, and it is through a consideration of the biopolitical that Coetzee's attentive rendering of the global politics of end-of-life care comes into focus. Foucault famously described the biopolitical regime as that which claims the right "to make live and to let die" (241). In novels such as *Slow Man* and *Life & Times of Michael K*, Coetzee respectively explores the effects of a regime wherein one is made to live as one faces death and wherein one is left to die when one might live. Rather than calling for the practice of a hospice of unconditional hospitality, these fictions foreground how Coetzee's work signals the impossibility of such a practice within a globalized regime committed to managing inequality.

Slow Man, following *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*, presents Elizabeth Curren's close literary successor, Elizabeth Costello. Although Costello lives in Australia, not South Africa, she, like Curren, is a former classics professor who viscerally apprehends her mortality. Accordingly, *Slow Man*, like *Age of Iron*, is concerned with the profound effects of biopolitical governance on human life, and this shared concern draws a structural parallel between apartheid South Africa and twenty-first-century Australia. As Peter Vermeulen argues, *Slow Man* examines the way in which better care cannot be achieved through appeals to care better. Costello's relationship with Paul Rayment, Vermeulen contends, demonstrates the contemporary nonsensicality of reliance on cultural scripts premised on supposedly human attributes such as empathy and desire, which depend on the valuing of individual human capacities. Vermeulen attends to the kinds of care in such a situation that are available to the central characters of *Slow Man*, as Rayment and Costello negotiate life after an amputation and with a bad heart, respectively. Drawing on Eric Santner's discussion of creaturely life, Vermeulen reads Rayment's refusal of Costello's vision of a shared future of mutual "loving care" as recognition of the vulnerability and inadequacy of human-centered social and cultural relationships (670). The precarity of late capital-

ism, he suggests, requires new cultural scripts for comprehending what Santner describes as "exposure to the radical contingency of the forms of life that constitute the space of meaning within which human life unfolds" (qtd. in Vermeulen 559–60). Such scripts, which I contend are also staged in Coetzee's representation of the son who feels cornered into care for his father and the doctor who feels frustrated in his care for his patient, acknowledge the crisis of individual human need within what I have described as the biopolitical state. An offer of "loving care," like the "prospect of ministering" that John Coetzee faces or the "we" that Dr. Syfret invokes, is more isolating than comforting, by virtue of a wider culture structured according to principles of managing life itself.

The limits of Elizabeth Curren's hospitality to Vercueil, along with the limits to the ethical practice of hospice that is instantiated between them both, become evident when we attend to how the managerial principles of the state permeate culture more broadly. As much as Elizabeth gives herself and her home over to Vercueil, and as much as he reciprocates by helping her to eat and to bathe, she asserts that "he is as far from being a nurse, a *nourrice*, a nourisher, as I can imagine" and insists that "I have to guide his hand" (196). The attempt to assert authority over Vercueil, like the assurance that he lacks "decency," evidences a power relation that reflects the characters' ongoing histories of unequal property and wealth (197). Vercueil may come to dwell in Elizabeth's house, but he does not and will not own it. This inequality effects Elizabeth's adoption of a managerial stance ("I have to guide") and points toward how she, like so many of Coetzee's protagonists, is complicit in the system that she critiques.⁹ Her intimate relationship with Vercueil, which is structured by her judgments that he lacks both care and decency, exemplifies the tendency to hierarchize life that, within biopolitical regimes, purportedly serves to justify the continuation of a status quo characterized by unequal access to material resources.

Elizabeth and Vercueil's relationship, in other words, cannot be disentangled from the biopolitical logic of the South African apartheid state, wherein a managerial approach to life was invoked to argue for the supposed necessity of radical inequality. Even though Vercueil's racial identity remains ambiguous, his economic dispossession ineluctably evokes the broader history of exclusionary, racially determined ownership entitlements in South Africa and, consequently, the ways in which inhospitable laws ensured hospice care was available in radically unequal terms. Those who were denied the right to property by virtue of their perceived race were also subjected to state management as violent abandonment, insofar as this management was constituted by the denial of all care and the infliction of profound

harm. Consciousness of this violence structures both *Summertime* and *Age of Iron*. John Coetzee's fragmented diary includes notes on the "South African gulag" (*Summertime* 15). Elizabeth Curren bears witness to the shooting of the child Bheki by state security forces. A hospice of unconditional hospitality is rendered impossible within such a state, insofar as the state's unequal enforcement of benefits and violence continuously delimits ethical relations.

The violent management of end-of-life care inflicted on those who face death without property, which may be conceived and experienced as profound abandonment and absolute nonrecognition, while treated in *Summertime* and *Age of Iron*, is perhaps most searchingly represented in *Life & Times of Michael K*. Anna K, like Elizabeth Curren, finds "how indifferent the world could be to an old woman with an unsightly illness in time of war" (7).¹⁰ For Anna K, however, this indifference is made all the more profound by virtue of her lack of wealth.¹¹ Whereas Elizabeth Curren has ongoing access to Dr. Syfret and needs only call him to receive a stronger prescription for painkillers, Anna K, who suffers from "gross swelling of the legs and arms," is "neglected by nurses who had no time to spend cheering up an old woman when there were young men dying spectacular deaths all about" (5). The wartime South African state renders Anna K terrified, not particularly of death itself but of how she will die: "Nothing that her son said could calm Anna K's fear of what might happen to her if she lost her room" (7). A domestic worker, she finds herself "withheld from the gutter only by the unreliable good-will of the Buhmanns," in whose home she has a room. Somerset Hospital, like the hospital in Stellenbosch where Anna K will die, has too few staff working to care for too many people, as an overworked nurse in the latter hospital will later desperately and angrily assert to Michael K. As David Babcock argues, Anna K's neglect while in hospital signifies how, within the novel, medicine is a profession "in which the aporias of the biopolitical state are felt especially keenly by its practitioners, who are daily confronted with bodies whose individuality they cannot afford to acknowledge" (896). The so-called human economy of this biopolitical state, Babcock argues, is nothing less than "barbaric" (902) in its elevation of "the imperatives of welfare and security" over the needs of "unique human bodies" (897). However much hospital workers wish to offer hospitable care, they are unable to do so within a system that, as Elizabeth Curren begins to intuit in her interaction with Dr. Syfret, privileges some lives over others and black lives not at all.

Against Crisis

What emerges from this reading of Coetzee's fiction is the possibility of hospice care that acknowledges the ethical imperative of absolute responsibility, of unconditional hospitality, to those who are dying and those with whom we die, as well as the economic and political regimes that delimit the exercise of such responsibility. Coetzee's work gestures toward a conditional, imperfect hospice that is more responsible to the singular difference of individuals than the unequal regimes of management and abandonment enforced by a biopolitical system that hierarchizes life. One starting point for explicating this form of hospice develops by reading Coetzee's work in conjunction with Eric Cazdyn's book on politics, culture, and illness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *The Already Dead*.¹² Cazdyn's account of how discourses of management and abandonment are subtended by a particular conception of a temporality of crisis throws into relief how Coetzee's fictions extend toward modes of living with dying that resist the systemic relegation of death to such a temporality and thus uphold a responsible, more hospitable form of end-of-life care that struggles against radical, racialized inequality.

Cazdyn, as in Coetzee's literature, identifies a biopolitical regime, produced by global capitalism, whereby some die without care of any kind while others die with total management.¹³ One of the insights that distinguishes Cazdyn's work from other contemporary theory centered on dying and death is the contention that both ways of living-dying are subject to a dominant conception of temporality that Cazdyn describes as the "new chronic" (17).¹⁴ The time of the "new chronic," proposes Cazdyn, is the time of globalized capitalism, which "assumes that everything will remain the same as the present turns into the future." It is a temporality that refuses to imagine real change, even as it is "provoked by (and provokes) very real fears and vulnerabilities." As the new chronic manifests in conceptions of dying and death, it is "a mode of time that cares little for terminality and acuteness" (13). It positions the present of dying as yet another constantly managed crisis that will extend endlessly into the future. Care for the wealthy and comfortable who are dying is thus conceived in terms of the perpetuation of wealth and the extension of comfort, although these are imagined to be always under threat. The lack of care for the impoverished and isolated who are dying is in turn conceived as unfortunately necessary in the name of constantly managing global crisis (132). In both cases, those who are dying are rendered "already dead" (5): their death is imagined as part of the present so that it can simultaneously be imagined as part of a manageable future. The time of the new chronic that produces the already dead

thereby functions to maintain and exacerbate the massive inequalities integral to global capitalism.

Cazdyn's focus on the temporality of dying shapes his call for ethico-political interventions in end-of-life care that would encompass both the few and the many. Cazdyn argues that the already dead embody liberating potential insofar as they are best positioned to comprehend the global system of chronic time and conceive of death in alternate terms. The one who is dying with total care and management may challenge attempts to manage death by conceiving of it as being in full continuity with life. They may challenge, that is, discourses that "inextricably link life with death, so that death acts to fundamentally limit the imagination and contain radical political desire" (188). Concomitantly, the one who is dying with no care may challenge attempts to "terrorize life" by promising a death of total rupture and abandonment (188): "death and dying might always be terrifying," concedes Cazdyn, "but it is a terror that does not need to be defined by the state" (204). Such challenges from the already dead may offer in turn a way of reconceiving the temporality of death outside of continuity (management) and rupture (abandonment): "the already dead flashes the radical possibility of usurping dominant discourses of life and death and reigniting revolutionary consciousness" (189). Cazdyn calls for solidarity among the already dead, such that we come to "die—and in the meantime live—together" (158) in a "collective project" that will "resist the new chronic time of global capitalism" (195). In other words, Cazdyn proposes that there may be a form of dying and living that exceeds the extension of the present into the future by rendering it in terms of continuously managed crisis.

Cazdyn's resistance to the new chronic finally takes the form of a promising consciousness of alternative temporalities. Cazdyn readily concedes that "reigniting revolutionary consciousness" is not equivalent to revolutionary political action, although he is hopeful that the already dead can "evinced a political consciousness that can inspire and inform political movements" (200). His most urgent questions include "how will the already dead transform into a collective political subject?" The question remains open, although Cazdyn looks forward to a "utopia of praxis" in which the particular temporal consciousness of the already dead is "recognized as a profound flash—and thus the possibility—of a radical future that already is" (204). Coetzee's fictions, in contrast, offer a different response to the inhospitable care structured by the new chronic. This response is centered not on revolutionary consciousness but on quotidian actions that render care for and by the dying not as absolute rupture or absolute continuity but as creative practice that quietly disrupts the neoliberal regime's management and hierarchizing of life.

My examples of creative end-of-life care in Coetzee's fiction are two, and each focuses on one side of the global management of hospice.¹⁵ My first example returns to *Life & Times of Michael K*, in which Anna K is terrorized by the threat of dying with no care. The state is structured so that, as a domestic worker who is considered already dead, Anna K will consistently be denied care, even as this denial is upheld as a necessary if unfortunate product of managing ongoing crisis. Anna K has been, and will be, admitted to hospital only after weeks of being bedridden, when she is "unable to walk and barely able to breathe"; in hospital, she will be neglected (5). The only other source of care available to her is her son. Yet, to support himself, Michael K must continue to work as a laborer, as his mother continued to work when he was a baby. While his mother could bring her child to work, where Michael K could watch her "polish other people's floors," Michael K may only attend to his mother's needs in the evenings (7). Unconditional hospice is impossible in such circumstances: Michael K has minimal time even for what the fictional John Coetzee calls the "business" of care (265).

Nonetheless, Anna K and Michael K come to envision and pursue a form of living-dying that exceeds the state's managed abandonment of Anna K. When Michael arrives one evening "speaking of layoffs," Anna conceives of "a project of quitting a city that held little promise for her" (7). She resolves that she will not die in the "purgatory" of state-sanctioned neglect and terror (5). Rather, she will return to Prince Albert, where as a child her family had "moved from one farm to another" and of which she has the "happiest" memories of her life: "if she was going to die, she would at least die under blue skies" (8). That her plan for her own death is also a plan for her life is affirmed insofar as Michael, to whom she does "not mention death or dying" (8), welcomes the proposed trip as that which offers a potential cure: he sees "in his mind's eye a whitewashed cottage in the broad veld . . . and standing at the front door his mother, smiling and well, ready to welcome him home at the end of a long day" (9). Against a system structured by a sense of ongoing crisis, mother and son envision a future that allows for acknowledging the possibilities of both terminality and cure. By pursuing a plan that offers Anna K the hope of living and dying while comforted by memories of her childhood in the countryside, they challenge the terrorization of Anna K's life by the prospect of a hellish death.

Notably, Michael K's care for his mother does not emerge from or depend on a shared revolutionary consciousness but on an unquestioning readiness to work for her vision of her own future. Anna K rather expects that Michael will protest her travel plans and "ask how she could believe that a small country town would take to its

bosom two strangers, one of them an old woman in bad health" (8). She presents her life savings to support her case and has prepared arguments to uphold the viability of her plan. Her preparations prove unnecessary: "not for an instant did Michael doubt her." His belief in Anna and "the wisdom of her plan for them" (9) is accompanied by the belief that "he had been brought into the world to look after his mother" (7). Prompted by this faith, Michael K quits his job and commits his time, labor, and creative energies to helping her reach Port Albert, even as these energies are thwarted at every turn. He applies for permits to travel by train; they never arrive. He builds a rickshaw to transport his mother by foot; the pair is turned back at checkpoints. Yet, Michael K persists in his faith-based work; for him, caring for his mother is not so much a business as it is a vocation.¹⁶ He cares for her with no regard to neoliberal logics of scarcity and necessity, even as those logics profoundly circumscribe the care he is able to provide. As Michael K is guided by his mother's vision of the future, he works to realize an imagined world that is less inhospitable to Anna K, one in which she might live and die in a place that seems like "home" (9).

Importantly, in *Life & Times*, Michael K's care for his mother does not signal an ethical endpoint—the achievement of an ideal of unconditional hospitality—but the multiplication of new ethical problems.¹⁷ The rickshaw that Michael builds, for example, allows him to bring his mother "for a seafront ride that brought a smile to her lips"; it also, however, exposes her to "the damp weather" that "was not good for her" and that contributes to her still "unending worry about the future" (18). The care that eschews neoliberal logics of management and abandonment quickly emerges as promising in its potential to engender a smile yet also as unmanageable and rife with new fears. Like its protagonist, however, Coetzee's fiction suggests a faith in the desirability of this form of care, insofar as *Life & Times* itself embraces the projects of representing this unmanageability and imagining these fears. The fiction undertakes the responsibility of creatively envisioning more hospitable, yet still conditional, forms of hospice that depend not on the achievement of a looked-for utopia but on quotidian efforts to defy the supposed inevitability that dying must be part of a managed, ongoing crisis.

My second example of creative care comes from the more recent Elizabeth Costello short stories, "As a Woman Grows Older" and "The Old Woman and the Cats."¹⁸ Costello, like Anna K and Michael K, occupies a time "that resists viewing the future as anything other than an extension of the present" (Cazdyn 14). The state shapes the terror that Anna K feels in anticipating her death by rendering her home precarious and her options extremely limited, all in the name

of a supposedly necessary sacrifice to the management of crisis. It endeavors to shape Costello's anticipation of her death by rendering it as that which is to be managed as more or less an extension of a life defined by economic power. Costello, however, proves resistant to the discourse, adopted by her children, which would "inextricably link life with death" and thereby minimize the rupture of death (Cazdyn 188).

Costello, in "As a Woman Grows Older," is approached by these children, John and Helen, who propose that she should move from Australia to France or the United States to live near family so they can ensure her good care. Notably, whereas Anna K barely has a room, Costello will find room in whichever country her children happen to live: the neoliberal global regime will do much to ensure that the circumstances of her death will perpetuate a status quo wherein the propertied family is increasingly responsible for ensuring the provision of end-of-life care, even if that care is ultimately provided by healthcare professionals. The view of death as that which is properly managed by the family is encapsulated by Costello's son John, who visits in "The Old Woman and the Cats," and through whom the story is focalized: "He came here to talk about death, about the prospect of death, his mother's death and how to plan for it, but not about her afterlife" (10). The notion of an "afterlife," of death as that which inaugurates a radical change, is unexpected for a son who conceives of death as that for which one plans.¹⁹ As per Cazdyn, whereas global capitalism terrorizes the economically weak through the threat of death without care, it positions death as a manageable extension or endpoint of life for the economically strong. Yet, death in the latter case is still within the time of the new chronic, wherein the present is imagined as a manageable crisis that will extend endlessly into the future.

In this context, Elizabeth Costello's refusal of her children's care, despite a system designed to facilitate her crossing of international borders to be nearer family that can further manage her care, plan for death, and inherit her wealth, forces those children to live moments that confront her death as unmanageable, as that which is no mere extension of a planned life. Just as understanding Anna K's illness in terms that disrupt stasis to mobilize visions of terminality and cure affect the way in which both Anna and Michael live, so Elizabeth Costello's insistence on an unplannable afterlife affects how mother and son exist in the present. When John visits Elizabeth, he finds her in rural Spain, eating "beans and spinach," and living in a home where the electricity will give out at night if you run the heater (7). He blanches at his mother's asceticism, finding it "more complicated than need be." He similarly dislikes his mother's housemates, which

include innumerable cats that she has saved from being drowned and shot by villagers as well as a man named Pablo, whom she has "promised to keep an eye on" so that Social Services will not "lock him up in what they called a place of safety" (9). Elizabeth intends to bequeath her estate to Pablo so that he might continue to feed the cats. John objects to what he perceives to be the irrationality of his mother's bequest as vehemently as he objects to her current living arrangements, repeatedly calling for better management. In his opinion, the cats should, ideally, be killed: "the world does not need any more of them" (21). If they are not killed, he maintains, Pablo should receive "a monthly stipend" (26) from a trust after Elizabeth's death and be subjected to "surprise visits" from an agent to ensure that he is "doing his duty" (26-27). John makes the case for an ethic of care that prioritizes the management of life and death alike so as to better ensure the management of wealth and resources.

In every instance, Elizabeth Costello objects to her son's logic. Her guardianship of the cats and Pablo, she suggests, is not based on "deliberate choice" but is a form of "giving-over" (25). This "giving-over," importantly, promises to be fully realized only in a future that she makes no attempt to manage. Against John's recommendations, Elizabeth simply trusts that, after her death, the cats will "go back to hunting" if Pablo does not feed them (27). (The case of Vercueil, an obvious literary predecessor of Pablo, is unpromising. Elizabeth Curren: "I asked him whether he was still feeding the cats. 'Yes,' he said, lying. For the cats are gone, chased out" [*Age* 197].) She also plans to leave her estate solely and unconditionally to Pablo, "to show him he is trusted, who has never been trusted before" (27). For Elizabeth Costello, as for Michael K, faith in another, though by no means signaling the realization of an ethical ideal of unconditional hospitality, engenders a mode of living-dying oriented, with no guarantees, toward a vision of the future that is more hospitable to those who are valued as already dead in the present. Coetzee's fiction insists that modes of care that eschew logics of extended crisis may be found in the present, quotidian reality not only of a son who refuses to abandon his mother but also of a mother who refuses to be managed by her son.

The ethical and political shortcomings of these realities of creative hospice, as I have read them, are manifest. That the responsibility for hospice rests on the parent-child bond in both works echoes the sentimental, privatizing discourse of neoliberalism that devolves responsibility for those who are dying to members of the normative family unit. Michael K's uncompensated nursing is symptomatic of the exploitation of his labor. While Elizabeth Costello's relationship with Pablo may express a radical political desire, a radical political

collectivity remains profoundly elusive. Yet, Coetzee's fiction does not seem to be either offering a manifestation of an ethical ideal or heralding new forms of political collectivity.²⁰ It casts a critical eye on the possibility that we may become unconditionally responsible to another within the strictures of global capitalism, while also declining to imagine a future in which these strictures have been overthrown. Instead, it offers stories of ways of dying and ways of caring for those who are dying that resist positing abandonment and management as the only options. In this sense, these fictions undertake the labor that Gayatri Spivak attributes to the humanities: namely, the "silent work, quiet work, slow work" of "rearranging the desires of people." Coetzee's fiction contributes to the creation of a culture in which the work of hospice is desired as a creative act that struggles with terror and stasis even as it looks always forward to an impossible future of unconditional care.

Notes

This essay revises and expands a paper presented at *Traverses: J. M. Coetzee in the World*, a conference held at the J. M. Coetzee Center for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide in November of 2015. I thank the conference participants for their comments.

1. In his biography of Coetzee, Kannemeyer charts how the events in *Summertime* converge and diverge from historical record (440–41).
2. In "Critic and Citizen: A Response," Coetzee describes the "cultural arm of neoliberalism," or "the new global imperialism," as that which can be detected "in the most intimate corners of our lives, or if not in our own, then in our students' lives" (111).
3. By focusing on reading this fiction's approach to the work of hospice, I distinguish this paper from excellent scholarship on mortality in Coetzee's work, which has addressed questions of responsibility to the dead (Durrant) and conceptualizations of care more generally (Zimble).
4. Marais's *Secretary of the Invisible* reads Coetzee's work as propounding a notion of writing in which "the text must *host* the other and so enable it to interrupt history" (xv). Marais builds on and diverges from Attridge's seminal *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, which explores "how Coetzee's works both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds" (xii).
5. Hospitality and hospice share the Latin root *hospes*, meaning both host and stranger (Floriani and Schramm 216).

6. Coetzee's commitment to exploring the ethical relations between human and nonhuman animals means that a consideration of responsible end-of-life care in his work ought not to be restricted to a discussion of the former. While a full discussion of care for nonhuman animals facing death is beyond the scope of this essay, its conclusions are not necessarily restricted to care for human animals.
7. This analysis of Derrida's idea of unconditional hospitality in relation to Coetzee's work draws on that offered in my monograph, *J. M. Coetzee and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism*. See 135–38.
8. See especially *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which presents the 1978–79 lectures. Biopower is first described in the 1975–76 lectures, "Society Must Be Defended."
9. In *Giving Offense*, Coetzee suggests his own potential complicity in the governing logics of apartheid South Africa, intimating that his prose may exemplify "the pathology" of paranoia that he ascribes to the state (37).
10. In an interview with Attwell in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee refers to Elizabeth Curren's death as a "private death" (250); the characterization may also apply to Anna K.
11. That poverty correlates with racialization in the war-torn society of *Michael K* is implied not only by human history but also by the bureaucrat Noël's assertion that "we are fighting this war . . . so that minorities will have a say in their destinies" (157).
12. Brittan's "Death and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" uses Gilroy's notion of the inhuman as another starting point for discussing the ethics and politics of death in Coetzee's work. Brittan examines the possibility for grace within the postcolony, where those who are "unthinkable" are "as good as dead" (483).
13. Cazdyn identifies and prefers the term "bioeconomic" to describe the form of contemporary global power (154). Whereas the biopolitical generates a state of exception premised on the "denationalization of citizens and the seizure of rights," the bioeconomic generates a state of exception—a justification for inequality—based on "the logic of the market" (153). Whereas the logic of the biopolitical appeals to a state of exception "as an excuse for violence," the logic of the bioeconomic principle appeals to a state of scarcity to argue that "it cannot afford to do the right thing" (154). Works such as *Michael K* and *Age of Iron* arguably stage both a state of exception and a state of scarcity.
14. Cazdyn's focus on the temporality of the "new chronic" distinguishes his work on the "already dead" from those contemporary theoretical concepts with which he is in close conversation: Slavoj Žižek's "'undead,'" Jean-Luc Nancy's "'living dead,'" Giorgio Agamben's "'bare life,'" and Margaret Lock's "'twice dead'" (Cazdyn 8). The focus on the temporality of dying further distinguishes Cazdyn's theory from works on biological and symbolic death that he does not explicitly address, such as Mbembe's necropolitics and Gilroy's inhuman.

15. My discussion of instances of end-of-life care in Coetzee's work is by no means exhaustive. Prominent omitted examples, to name just two, include the relationship between Lurie and euthanized animals in *Disgrace* and Anya and JC in *Diary of a Bad Year*. I have chosen to focus on works that most closely align with discourses of crisis.
16. Babcock's reading of Michael K's vocation as gardener inspires my reading of Michael K's vocation as nurse.
17. The epilogue of *J. M. Coetzee and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism* similarly argues that in Coetzee's fiction, faith in an other "offers no guaranteed or inevitable outcome" (164).
18. I read the Elizabeth Costello character in these stories as an extension of the protagonist of *Elizabeth Costello* and *The Lives of Animals*, who is an Australian novelist preoccupied with her mortality and also has a son named John, as well as the protagonist of *Slow Man*, who lives in Australia and is a writer. I readily concede that the equation of the Elizabeth Costellos may be inexact.
19. In a letter to De Bruyckere that appears in *Cripplewood/Kreupelhout*, the record of De Bruyckere's exhibition for the 55th International Venice Biennale in which "The Old Woman and the Cats" is published, Coetzee argues that "[w]hatever its technical (legal) status, all flesh is live and therefore sacred" (50). The statement suggests the unmanageability of the afterlife of the biological body.
20. My language echoes Coetzee's oft-quoted claim, "I am not a herald of community" (*Doubling* 341).

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