



ENGL 337, Study of a Major Author

J. M. Coetzee

T/R Fall 2021

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The Nobel-prize winning author J. M. Coetzee is one of the most talented writers working today. Primarily concerned with questions of justice, his texts explore issues including human rights, animal rights, political oppression, racial inequality, forced migration, and the ethics of care. Coetzee is both a provincial writer and a global citizen, equally invested in addressing the gross human rights violations of apartheid South Africa and exploring philosophical questions about what it means to be part of the world.

Coetzee sustains a profound interest in how language works. Consistently probing the extent to which literature can accurately represent the world, he reflects on the metaphysics of writing and the limits of representation. His texts expand the realm of the possible, blending fiction with memoir, philosophy with the novel, abstraction with reportage. In his characteristically stark and beautiful prose, Coetzee explores what it means to be human.

This course studies a wide range of texts from Coetzee's oeuvre, including novels, memoirs, essays, and political tracts. It also situates his work in its cultural and political contexts, including the historical circumstances of racial segregation and authoritarian rule in apartheid South Africa, the literary influences of European high modernism and Afrikaner pastoral novels, and the theoretical concerns of continental theory and linguistics. Students taking this course will develop a thorough knowledge of one of contemporary literature's major authors as well as a broad awareness of South African literary concerns.

Texts will include

Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)

Life & Times of Michael K (1985)

The Master of St. Petersburg (1995)

Disgrace (2000)

The Childhood of Jesus (2014)

And selected essays