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J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event

By Derek Attridge



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Nobel Prize-winning novelist J. M. Coetzee is one of the most widely taught contemporary writers, but also one of the most elusive. Many critics who have addressed his work have devoted themselves to rendering it more accessible and acceptable, often playing down the features that discomfort and perplex his readers.

Yet it is just these features, Derek Attridge argues, that give Coetzee's work its haunting power and offer its greatest rewards. Attridge does justice to this power and these rewards in a study that serves as an introduction for readers new to Coetzee and a stimulus for thought for those who know his work well. Without overlooking the South African dimension of his fiction, Attridge treats Coetzee as a writer who raises questions of central importance to current debates both within literary studies and more widely in the ethical arena. Implicit throughout the book is Attridge's view that literature, more than philosophy, politics, or even religion, does singular justice to our ethical impulses and acts. Attridge follows Coetzee's lead in exploring a number of issues such as interpretation and literary judgment, responsibility to the other, trust and betrayal, artistic commitment, confession, and the problematic idea of truth to the self.



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Editorial Review

Review

"An introduction for readers new to Coetzee and a stimulus for thought to those who know his work well."

(*Fabula*)

A CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, 2006
(Outstanding Academic Titles, 2006 *CHOICE* 2006-01-01)

"An important milestone in the critical reception of Coetzee's ongoing *oeuvre*."
(Peggy Kamuf *Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*)

"An accessible, readable analysis of Coetzee's oeuvre. . . . [Attridge's] overall theoretical argument, that modernism holds some insights worth revisiting in the contemporary global context, is powerful. He provides a strong example of how we might move toward a deeper consideration of the ethical force that literature can have for both the reader and the critic."
(Antonia Smith *H-Net Book Review*)

"Attridge's study is not simply a comprehensive and up-to-date discussion of Coetzee's writing but also a compelling meditation on what literature is and what it does to its readers. [It] not only convinces us of the significance of Coetzee's novels but also of the significance of Attridge as a literary critic."
(Mark Libin *English Studies in Canada*)

About the Author

Derek Attridge is professor of English at the University of York. He is the author or editor of numerous works, including *Peculiar Language*, *Joyce Effects*, *Meter and Meaning*, *Poetic Rhythm*, and *The Singularity of Literature*.

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