



Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II

By J. M. Coetzee

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J.M. Coetzee's latest novel, *The Schooldays of Jesus*, is now available from Viking. *Late Essays: 2006-2016* will be available January 2018.

The second installment of J. M. Coetzee's fictionalized "memoir" explores a young man's struggle to experience life to its full intensity and transform it into art. The narrator of *Youth* has long been plotting an escape—from the stifling love of his overbearing mother, a father whose failures haunt him, and what he is sure is impending revolution in his native country of South Africa. Arriving at last in London in the 1960s, however, he finds neither poetry nor romance and instead begins a dark pilgrimage into adulthood. *Youth* is a remarkable portrait of a consciousness, isolated and adrift, turning in on itself, of a young man struggling to find his way in the world, written with tenderness and a fierce clarity.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

After the brooding, dark menace of his Booker Prize-winning novel *Disgrace*, J.M. Coetzee's *Youth* is a slighter, more restrained work. Written in succinct, almost cold prose, it's a painfully maudlin *bildsrungsroman* that explores the dreary follies of youth rather than its more celebrated joys. The unprepossessing protagonist John is a South African mathematics graduate with literary aspirations, a dreamer who constantly yearns to meet a girl who will serve as his lover and muse. Having abandoned Cape Town after Sharpeville he finds Swinging '60s London grey, damp, and uninviting. Reluctantly he finds employment as a computer programmer. In between trundling from his grimy Archway bedsit to his soulless job, this autodidactic Pooter dabbles on a study of Ford Maddox Ford, composes an Ezra Pound-inspired poem (ostentatiously entitled "The Portuguese Rock-Lobster Fisherman"), and embarks on "one humiliating affair after another." Despite his artistic and romantic endeavors, John seems only able to cultivate "dull, honest, misery" and, broken by London, flees to a new programming job in Berkshire. Here he practically renounces literature and, for a while at least, concentrates on chess problems and feeding primitive computers magnetic tape. His creative and sexual drives appear to have gone, leaving him to consider the possibility that he might actually have grown up.

Like the halting, self-interrogating consciousness of John's computers, Coetzee renders his character's inner life through a series of rhetorical questions. These lend the book a curiously existentialist air but also contribute to its slightly dilatory gait. (It feels far longer than its 170-odd pages.) Coetzee's tone is so laconic it's hard, on occasions, to be entirely certain if John's poetic ambitions should be pitied or simply laughed at. However, this novel does offer an unflinchingly acute dissection of the adolescent male psyche. --*Travis Elborough, Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

One need not have read *Boyhood*, Coetzee's previous autobiographical account, to appreciate this sequel, as he continues to look back on his quest for identity and a yearned-for vocation as a poet. Written from a third-person, present-tense point of view, but intimately describing the inner life of John, this slim memoir examines several years of Coetzee's expatriate life as he flees Cape Town in the 1960s to educate himself and pursue his destiny in London. It's a bleak time. A series of failed encounters sexual and social leave the emotionally immature protagonist feeling lonely and isolated. He wavers between pretentious defenses of his artistic purity and self-loathing assessments of his lack of talent and his unease as an outsider. A soul-destroying job as a computer programmer at IBM sucks away his peace of mind. Other attempts to do meaningful work and to establish personal relationships ensue, but the grand moment of definition never comes. John is waiting for romance or tragedy to strike so he can be consumed and remade, but he has only a flawed, naive understanding of the world. Simultaneously miserable in London and convinced that South Africa is an accursed wound within him, he rejects both as inimical to literature. Booker Prize winner Coetzee's (*Disgrace*) artistry allows him to write about his youthful self from the vantage point of adult knowledge while reflecting on his self-involved intellectual and social gaucheries with detached, wry humor. Though he fails to make his intense and awkward personality particularly appealing, Coetzee succeeds in defining the dilemma of the artist-as-a-young-man in sympathetic if angst-ridden terms that reflect the doubts of those who decide to devote their lives to literature without any idea of how they can make a meaningful contribution.

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From Library Journal

Picking up where his memoir *Boyhood* left off, Coetzee chronicles his coming of age in South Africa and London during the 1960s. Writing in the third person, Coetzee narrates the story of a young mathematics student named John who is hungry for excitement, adventure, and mystery. Increasingly dissatisfied with his inability to suck life's marrow in his native South Africa and also afraid of being conscripted into the army, John runs off to London to seek his fortune. He finds a job as a computer programmer, but his heart's great desire is to burn with the inner flame of the artist, so he spends his spare time writing poetry (he worships Ezra Pound) and searching in London bookshops for poetry journals. Along the way, he assuages his loneliness with sexual affairs, only to become lonelier when he realizes that he cannot offer these women a clue to the darkness that lies inside him. D.H. Lawrence meets Alan Paton in Coetzee's sometimes brilliant, sometimes tedious account of his sexual exploits, revolutionary fervor, and artistic evolution. This second memoir by the author of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and other popular novels is recommended for all libraries.

- *Henry L. Carrigan Jr., Lancaster, PA*

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Barbara Jackson:

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Amber Tyson:

In this particular era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability in doing something more are more treasured than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple solution to have that. What you need to do is just spending your time very little but quite enough to possess a look at some books. One of several books in the top collection in your reading list will be *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II*. This book that is certainly qualified as *The Hungry Slopes* can get you closer in becoming precious person. By looking right up and review this publication you can get many advantages.

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