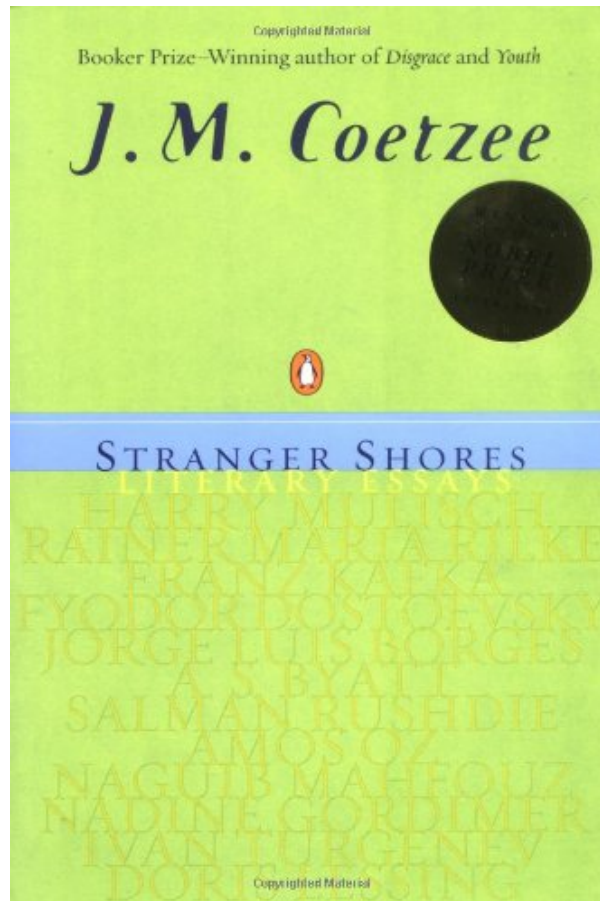
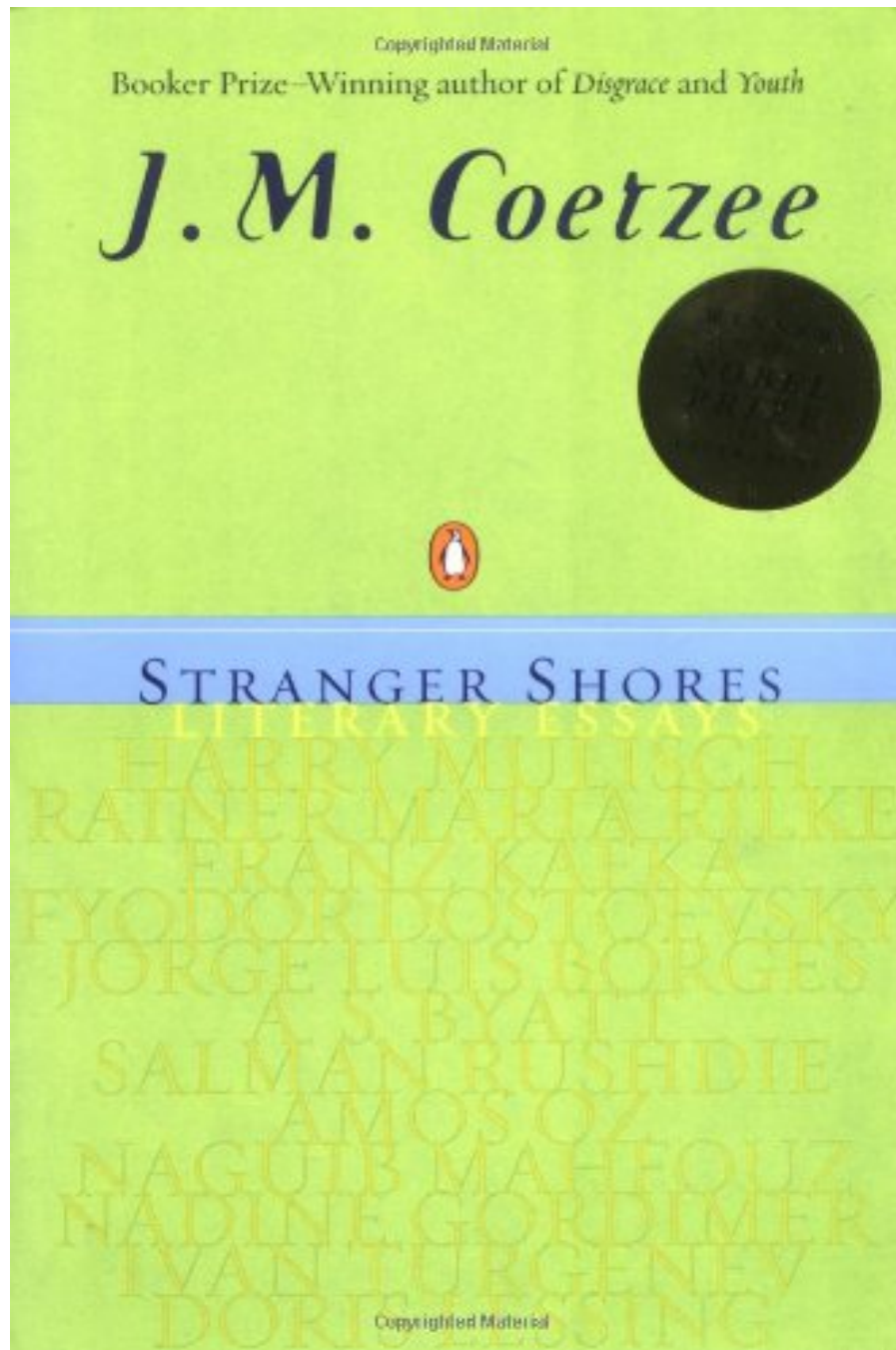


STRANGER SHORES: LITERARY ESSAYS BY J. M. COETZEE



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From Publishers Weekly

Tackling works by Rushdie, Naguib Mahfouz, Doris Lessing, Borges and A.S. Byatt, *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays* collects critical work by South African author and two-time Booker-winner J.M. Coetzee. Coetzee posits in "What Is a Classic" that "[c]riticism... is duty-bound to interrogate the classic" and thereby "may be what the classic uses to define itself and ensure its survival." None of these thoughtful, deft and erudite essays, all but one of which were previously published, land heavily or obviously (if at all) on any side of a literary, critical or political issue like Coetzee's poised fiction.

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STRANGER SHORES: LITERARY ESSAYS BY J. M. COETZEE

PDF

Two-time Booker Prize-winner J. M. Coetzee is one of the world's greatest novelists. This thought-provoking collection gathers twenty-six of his essays on books and writing. In his opening piece, "What Is a Classic?", Coetzee asks, "What does it mean in living terms to say that the classic is what survives?" He explores the answer by way of T. S. Eliot, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Zbigniew Herbert. Coetzee goes on to discuss eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors such as Defoe and Turgenev, the German modernists such as Rilke, Kafka, and Musil, and the giants of late-twentieth-century literature, among them Brodsky, Gordimer, Rushdie, and Lessing.

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Most helpful customer reviews

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

A Good Resource

By EL

This is, overall, an excellent book, and provides exemplary models of both the literary essay and sympathetic criticism. Coetzee also sets the bar at fluency in three languages.

The standout pieces are those focusing on T.S. Eliot, Gass's Rilke, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. Overall, his treatments of German, South African, and Russian literatures are the strongest, and essays are grouped more or less by subject nationalities. There are also thematic threads running between pieces that give the book a sense of organization by chapter, rather than of separate works grouped together. Coetzee is careful to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each author, referring to collective works to find explanations when they are not readily available in the individual pieces. He is highly sympathetic with the process of writing a novel, and treats most of his subjects in light of this recognition.

Given all this, I was a little baffled when I came to his essay on Brodsky. Though he does acknowledge Brodsky's genius in the final paragraph, the piece as a whole feels like the expulsion of a long-held grudge against the writer. He thoroughly undermines Brodsky's philosophies and politics (whose identical characteristics he supports wholeheartedly when they appear in Borges' and Dostoevsky's works); and does so to the exclusion of an actual discussion of Brodsky's writing.

As a whole, however, this is an excellent collection. For those new to literary criticism, it brings a clear and unique insight to the evaluation of (and creation of) a novel's structure; and for those who are much more well-read in criticism, a clear respect for the author and a unique manipulation of a reader's curiosity and intelligence. I think that's enough caveats for one review:) I definitely recommend this book.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Superb and challenging

By C. Collins

This book is very exceptional. Coetzee's literary criticisms are of the highest level. He discusses a very broad range of writers and books, including; Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe; Samuel Richardson's odd novel *Clarissa*; Cees Nooteboom's retelling of fairy tales; a critique of William Gass's critique of the poems of

Rilke; the difficulty in translating Kafka; the novel *The Man Without Qualities* by Robert Musil, as well as Musil's *Diaries* published after his death; the most productive years of Dostoevsky; the essays (as well as career and poems) of Joseph Brodsky; a fantastic summary of the career and work of J.L. Borges; another penetrating essay on the serial works of A. S. Byatt; the novels of Caryl Phillips; the career of Salman Rushdie; a review of Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz's *The Harafish*; a fascinating essay on Daphne Rooke; an essay on Nadine Gordimer's advice to South African writers to look to the Russian intellectuals prior to the fall of Nicholas and Alexandria for resonance with current South Africa's dilemma; and a wonderful essay on Doris Lessing's life and work.

Coetzee is brilliant, I have loved his novels, but his literary criticism is some of the most thought provoking essays I have read in years. This book is highly recommended.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Essays of the highest order

By Luc REYNAERT

J. M. Coetzee delves deep into the (hidden) soul of the authors and their work reviewed in these splendid essays. Many novels are (or will become) 'classics', in Coetzee's words, 'works of art which retain meaning for succeeding ages and which continue to 'live'.

Daniel Defoe is an author eclipsed by one of his creations (*Robinson Crusoe*).

The 'Four Quartets' of T.S. Eliot are an attempt to give a historical backing for a radical conservative program for a Europe of nation-states with the Catholic Church as the principal supranational organization.

Samuel Richardson's 'Clarissa' is a fight on two fronts. A social one: Clarissa is a member of a powerful family and bringing her down would bring down her family. A gender one: the virtue in women is not proof against the traitorous sexual desire which a skilful seducer can arouse.

Cees Nooteboom is an intelligent traveler, but nevertheless part of the tourism industry.

In 'A posthumous confession', Marcellus Emants turns a confession of a worthless life into a work of art.

R.M. Rilke's doctrine excuses all sins except those against Art.

F. M. Dostoevsky conducts a searching interrogation of the 'Reason of the Enlightenment'.

The eccentric J. Brodsky elevates prosody to metaphysical status. He despairs of politics and looks to literature for redemption.

For J.L. Borges, the poetic imagination enables the writer to join the universal creative principle. This principle has the nature of Will rather than Reason (Schopenhauer).

A. Oz escapes the intolerance and intransigence which have marred the public face of Israel.

N. Mahfouz's main concern is to link private virtue with civic justice.

D. Lessing explores the mystery of the self and the destiny it elects.

For N. Gordimer, the artist has a special calling. His art tells a truth transcending the truth of history. The goal of art is to transform society and reunite what has been put asunder.

B. Breytenbach's credo is to be against the norm, hegemony, the State and power.

These formidable essays contain also comments on the problems of translation (F. Kafka) and the media (the camera has no ideology: it will lie on behalf of whoever points it and presses the button).

Africa - a continent abused, exploited and patronized by foreigners - is still in the aftershock of colonialism. It is now confronted with hard choices between economic stagnation coupled with a fast rising birth rate or un-African Western science and technology, rationalism, materialism, the profit motive, the cult of the individual and the nuclear family.

These model reviews written by a superb free mind, are a must read for all literature students and lovers of world literature.

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