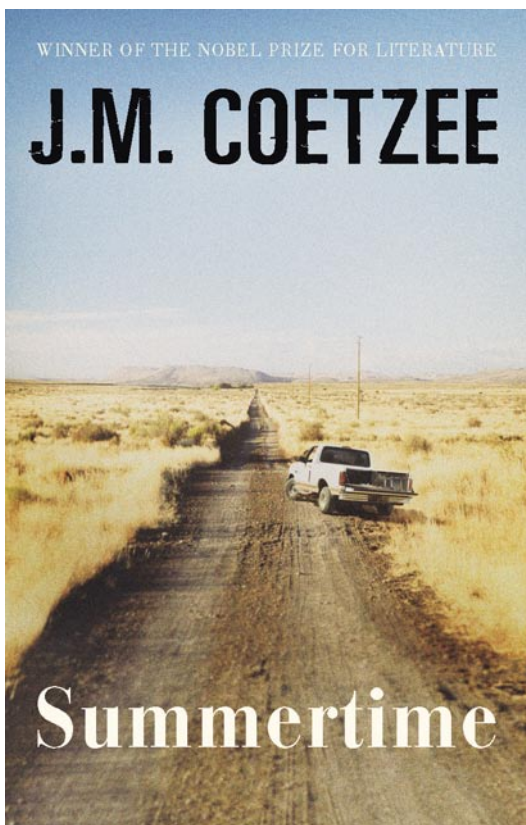




Reader's Guide



Other books by JM Coetzee

In the Heart of the Country (1977)
Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)
Life & Times of Michael K (1983)
Foe (1986)
Age of Iron (1990)
The Master of Petersburg (1994)
Slow Man (2005)
Diary of a Bad Year (2007)

Summertime JM Coetzee

Published by Harvill Secker
Price £17.99

www.themanbookerprize.com

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About the author

JM Coetzee was born in South Africa in 1940. He won the 1983 Booker Prize with *Life & Times of Michael K* and then again with *Disgrace* in 1999. His novels include *Waiting for the Barbarians* (awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1980) and *The Master of Petersburg* (awarded the Irish Times International Fiction Prize in 1995). In 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. JM Coetzee lives in Australia.

Summertime

A young English biographer is working on a book about the late writer, John Coetzee. He plans to focus on the years from 1972–1977 when Coetzee, in his thirties, is sharing a run-down cottage in the suburbs of Cape Town with his widowed father. This, the biographer senses, is the period when he was ‘finding his feet as a writer’.

Never having met Coetzee, he embarks on a series of interviews with people who were important to him – a married woman with whom he had an affair, his favourite cousin Margot, a Brazilian dancer whose daughter had English lessons with him, former friends and colleagues. From their testimony emerges a portrait of the young Coetzee as an awkward, bookish individual with little talent for opening himself to others.

Sometimes heartbreaking, often very funny, *Summertime* shows us a great writer as he limbers up for his task.

Discussion points

Why do you think JM Coetzee chose the title *Summertime*?

Adriana tells the biographer: ‘*Well, I am not giving you romance, I am giving you the truth. Maybe too much truth. Maybe so much truth that there will be no place for it in your book.*’ The previous two books in the *Scenes from a Provincial Life* trilogy (*Boyhood* and *Youth*) have been described as semi-fictionalised autobiography. How would you describe *Summertime* and what questions do you think it raises about the truthfulness of biography and autobiography?

In *Summertime*, the late John Coetzee’s biographer presents his subject through interviews with those he deems to have been important in the writer’s life. Do you think someone’s character is best revealed through the eyes of others? Are the multiple viewpoints insightful?

When Margot objects to the biographer recasting her words ‘*as a narrative*’, he states: ‘*changing the form should have no effect on the content.*’ Do you agree with this comment?

What does the book tell you about the South Africa of the time?

Themed reading

Everyman Philip Roth
As I Lay Dying William Faulkner
Running in the Family Michael Ondaatje

Useful links

www.themanbookerprize.com
www.nobelprize.org
www.randomhouse.co.uk