

J. M. Coetzee

Quotes

*Animal, Thinking, Heart, Men, People, World, Lying, Self, Children, Ideas, Doe,
Trying, Writing, Philosophy, Giving, Barbarians, Mind, Night, Hands, Fiction*

(I)f we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we fear guilt or retribution.

~J. M. Coetzee

The writers who have the deepest influence on one are those one reads in ones more impressionable, early life, and often it is the more youthful works of those writers that leave the deepest imprint.

~J. M. Coetzee

When all else fails, philosophize.

~J. M. Coetzee

We must cultivate, all of us, a certain ignorance, a certain blindness, or society will not be tolerable.

~J. M. Coetzee

I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering.

~J. M. Coetzee

But he cannot see a connection between the end of yearning and the end of poetry. Is that what growing up amounts to: growing out of yearning, of passion, of all intensities of the soul?

~J. M. Coetzee

All creatures come into the world bringing with them the memory of justice.

~J. M. Coetzee

I don't think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted.

~J. M. Coetzee

A book should be an axe to chop open the frozen sea inside us.

~J. M. Coetzee

Become major, Paul. Live like a hero. That's what the classics teach us. Be a main character. Otherwise what is life for?

~J. M. Coetzee

In my experience poetry speaks to you either at first sight or not at all. A flash of revelation and a flash of response. Like lightning. Like falling in love.

~J. M. Coetzee

Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is a part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.

~J. M. Coetzee

Strictly speaking, my interest is not in legal rights for animals but in a change of heart towards animals.

~J. M. Coetzee

Words are coin. Words alienate. Language is no medium for desire. Desire is rapture, not exchange.

~J. M. Coetzee

Belief may be no more, in the end, than a source of energy, like a battery which one clips into an idea to make it run.

~J. M. Coetzee

I am not the we of anyone

~J. M. Coetzee

The highest type of intelligence, says Aristotle, manifests itself in an ability to see connections where no one has seen them before, that is, to think analogically.

~J. M. Coetzee

From one seed a whole handful: that was what it meant to say the

bounty of the earth.

~J. M. Coetzee

Reason is simply a vast tautology.

~J. M. Coetzee

I am corrupted to the bone with the beauty of this forsaken world.

~J. M. Coetzee

The mode of consciousness of nonhuman species is quite different from human consciousness.

~J. M. Coetzee

Perhaps; but I am a difficult person to live with. My difficulty consists in not wanting to live with other people.

~J. M. Coetzee

Where civilization entailed the corruption of barbarian virtues and the creation of dependent people, I decided, I was opposed to civilization.

~J. M. Coetzee

I must not fall asleep in the middle of my life. Out of the blankness that surrounds me I must pluck the incident after incident after incident whose little explosions keep me going.

~J. M. Coetzee

The spark of true poetry flashes when ideas are juxtaposed that no one has yet thought of bringing together.

~J. M. Coetzee

His own opinion, which he does not air, is that the origin of speech lie in song, and the origins of song in the need to fill out with sound the overlarge and rather empty human soul.

~J. M. Coetzee

Unbelief is a belief.

~J. M. Coetzee

Sleep is no longer a healing bath, a recuperation of vital forces, but an oblivion, a nightly brush with annihilation.

~J. M. Coetzee

There seemed nothing to do but live.

~J. M. Coetzee

The most important of all rights is the right to life, and I cannot foresee a day when domesticated animals will be granted that right in law.

~J. M. Coetzee

I speak to the broken halves of all our selves and tell them to embrace, loving the worst in us equally with the best.

~J. M. Coetzee

Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt.

~J. M. Coetzee

Long visits don't make for good friends.

~J. M. Coetzee

I tend to resist invitations to interpret my own fiction.

~J. M. Coetzee

I say that I represent this movement because my intellectual allegiances are clearly European, not African.

~J. M. Coetzee

It gets harder all the time, Bev Shaw once said. Harder, yet easier. One gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be hard as hard can be grows harder yet.

~J. M. Coetzee

The barbarians come out at night.

~J. M. Coetzee

For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing.

~J. M. Coetzee

Despair ... is like a gas, odourless, tasteless, without nourishment. You breathe it in, your limbs relax, you cease to care, even at the moment when the steel touches your throat.

~J. M. Coetzee

The end of confession is to tell the truth to and for oneself.

~J. M. Coetzee

If I, this mortal shell, am going to die, let me at least live on through my creations.

~J. M. Coetzee

Unimaginable perhaps; but the unimaginable is there to be imagined.

~J. M. Coetzee

Temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body. Follow your temperament. It is not a philosophy, It is a rule, like the Rule of St Benedict.

~J. M. Coetzee

It is a world of words that creates a world of things.

~J. M. Coetzee

Once I lived in time as a fish in water, breathing it, drinking it, sustained

by it. Now I kill time and time kills me.

~J. M. Coetzee

If there were a better, clearer, shorter way of saying what the fiction says, then why not scrap the fiction?

~J. M. Coetzee

Being a father ... I can't help feeling that, by comparison with being a mother, being a father is a rather abstract business.

~J. M. Coetzee

Should philosophers be expected to change the world? Such an expectation seems to me extravagant. Marx himself didn't change the world: he reinterpreted it, then other people changed it.

~J. M. Coetzee

Pleasure is hard to come by, but pain is everywhere these days, I must learn to subsist on it.

~J. M. Coetzee

[Hariharan is] an outstanding writer.

~J. M. Coetzee

No, Paul, I couldn't care less if you tell me made-up stories. Our lies reveal as much about us as our truths.' (Said to Paul by Elizabeth Costello, the interloping novelist-angel-inner voice).

~J. M. Coetzee

And anyway, I suspect he secretly liked it when a woman was cold and distant

~J. M. Coetzee

Was it serious? I don't know. It certainly had serious consequences.

~J. M. Coetzee

You are going to end up as one of those sad old men who poke around in rubbish bins.â€• â€œI'm going to end up in a hole in the ground... And so are you. So are we all.

~J. M. Coetzee

Our lies reveal as much about us as our truths

~J. M. Coetzee

Nothing is worse than what we can imagine.

~J. M. Coetzee

I said to myself, 'If you don't sit down to it today, when will you ever sit down to it?'

~J. M. Coetzee

Can desire grow out of admiration, or are the two quite distinct species? What would it be like to lie side by side, naked, breast to breast, with a woman one principally admires?

~J. M. Coetzee

In order to be cruel we have to close our hearts to the suffering of the other.

~J. M. Coetzee

he knows too much about himself to subject her to a morning after, when he will be cold, surly, impatient to be alone.

~J. M. Coetzee

I see no marks of Wordsworth's style of writing or style of thinking in my own work, yet Wordsworth is a constant presence when I write about human beings and their relations to the natural world.

~J. M. Coetzee

We are not by nature cruel.

~J. M. Coetzee

She gives him what he can only call a sweet smile. 'So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change.

~J. M. Coetzee

The gods, the immortals, were the inventors of death and corruption; yet with one or two notable exceptions they have lacked the courage to try their invention out on themselves.

~J. M. Coetzee

The devil is everywhere under the skin of things, searching for a way into the light.

~J. M. Coetzee

One day some as yet unborn scholar will recognize in the clock the machine that has tamed the wilds.

~J. M. Coetzee

The idea of writer as sage is pretty much dead today. I would certainly feel very uncomfortable in the role.

~J. M. Coetzee

Just as we bemoan the passing away of the Great Novel, a great novelist is likely to emerge, perhaps even from Denmark or Switzerland, to prove us wrong.

~J. M. Coetzee

When we are stirred to lament the loss of the gods, it is more than likely the gods who are doing the stirring.

~J. M. Coetzee

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