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J.M. Coetzee. *Inner Workings: Literary Essays 2000-2005*. Knopf, 2007.

Reviewed by Gillian Dooley in *The Adelaide Review*, 13 April 2007, p. 19.

J.M. Coetzee is best known as the 2003 Nobel laureate for literature and Booker Prize-winning novelist, but he has had a distinguished career as a literary scholar and critic. *Inner Workings* is his fifth volume of critical writings.

Many of these pieces were first published in the *New York Review of Books*, where review essays in the thousands of words are the norm. In many cases, Coetzee has expanded them for this book, taking the opportunity to follow interesting tangents and develop his incisive close readings even further.

The first half of the book contains eleven essays on twentieth-century European writers, usually in response to a new translation, giving the linguist in Coetzee ample scope to analyse its success or otherwise. In his piece on Paul Celan, he makes detailed comparisons of three translations of the poems: this is the kind of criticism which penetrates the very heart of how literature works. The second half is concerned mainly with English-language writers, although Graham Greene is the only English writer represented among Americans and 'post-colonials' like Gordimer and Naipaul.

Coetzee's criticism is profound and sophisticated without being obscure, and he provides background on each author: prior knowledge isn't assumed. His essays are worth reading for their insight into not only important though unfamiliar literary history, but also, obliquely, Coetzee's own literary ideas.