



## Diary of a Bad Year

*J.M. Coetzee*

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## Diary of a Bad Year J.M. Coetzee

The latest by the Nobel Prize-winning author of *Disgrace* is an utterly contemporary work of fiction that addresses the profound unease of countless people in democracies across the world.

## Diary of a Bad Year Details

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Author : J.M. Coetzee

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# From Reader Review Diary of a Bad Year for online ebook

## Marc says

A world famous, celebrated writer belittles himself, questions his merit, and indicates how futile his literary work actually is, that's what Coetzee presents us in this remarkable book.

Initially Coetzee offers a series of short essays on all kinds of issues, often international politics and human rights. Of course, we soon have the impression that here the author himself (Coetzee) speaks, hidden behind the very transparent alter ego 'JC', an aged South African writer, a bit sick and lonely, for some years living in Australia (as Coetzee is), and equally disillusioned in the politics of that country as those of his motherland. We here the voice of what we will call the left reasonableness, JC himself favors the term anarchism.

Coetzee immediately adds a second and later also a third 'Melody-line', literally visible with a three-panel layout. The second melody/layer seems to be quite trivial and describes the platonic relationship of JC with a Philippine beauty he has hired to type his a manuscript; initially the focus is on the rather pathetic obsession of the older man (she calls him Senor C) for the charms of his secretary. In the third melody-line we hear the voice of the Philippine woman herself, and it appears that she consciously uses these charms. But at some point her focus turns to what the old man writes, she brings into words what that does with her (she finds it all rather pedantic actually) and she gradually develops sympathy for the pathetic old man. She urges him even to shift the angle of his writings to a more introspective stance and to write more about life and literature. That leads to a breakup with her boyfriend, an intelligent but downright rude Australian who disparages the author with arguments that also seem to contain some truth.

The three melodies together form a very complex, rich book that you can access from different angles constantly. Intriguing, yet not quite successful. Especially the second and third melody-line constantly feel underdeveloped; one yearns to have more details on the (emotional) interaction between JC and the woman. It seems that Coetzee only uses this storyline as a teaser, to indicate what evolution takes place in the head of the author, doubting himself and his work, shifting his attention from the 'serious' world of politics and ethics to that of life, death and literature. In this way the short, dry essays ('opinions') keep dominating this book, at the expense of the real story line. And that is a pity.

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## Carl R. says

I believe I previously in these pages called Nobel winner J.M. Coetzee the finest craftsman writing in English today, and *Diary of a Bad Year* forces me to agree with myself. The book's structure--and I'm talking physical as well as literary structure here--gives credibility enough in itself. Three parallel voices appear on each page. On the top, the reader finds objective essays on matters political, philosophical, psychological ranging from Guantanamo Bay to music to motherhood. These are by and large pieces being composed as the novel proceeds, by the book's narrator, a prestigious author in his eighties, for a German publisher who is putting together a gathering of opinions from literary notables for a non-fiction anthology. In the center of each page, we find the voice of the narrator himself. On the bottom, that of the fetching young Filipina, Anya, who lives in the same apartment building as our writer. "Juan," or "señor," or "senior," or "C," as he is variously called, is beginning to suffer the effects of some sort of degenerative nerve disease which makes it difficult to manage either keyboard or pen, so he needs a someone to type his dictated words into an English manuscript which will eventually be translated into German and published along with those of his eminent colleagues. He hires Anya, with whom he is infatuated anyhow, and who is not above feeding his infatuation with a flirtatious mixture of genuine affection and blatant teasing. Their

budding relationship stokes the jealous fires of her live-in stockbroker boyfriend, whose animosity leads him to plot some serious embezzlement from a man who could never be a true rival, but whose competition, however imaginary, he nevertheless finds unbearable.

Out of this rather slight plot Coetzee creates a work of great depth and complexity. The interplay between the narrative and the ideas explored in the essays is endlessly intricate and elusive, like light shimmering on taffeta. In addition, Coetzee's narrator is some incarnation of himself. He (born, 1940) is a good distance away from the mid-eighties of "Juan," but he attributes the authorship of his own *Waiting for the Barbarians* to his fictitious alter-ego, and his description of another "acquaintance" sounds suspiciously close to another of his creations, Elizabeth Costello. So which part of "Juan" is Coetzee? Is the real life author suffering from Parkinson's? Is he taking the incredibly courageous step of imagining and writing about his own descent into infirmity? He's not saying, but the wondering adds a dimension to *Diary* that I recall in no other novel.

And, of course, Coetzee, is so much the academic and intellectual, that keeping up with the content--ideas and references--in Juan's essays presents a challenge in itself. (Not to the extent that Elizabeth Costello did. That one nearly did me in, and I confess I gave up trying to understand it.) So, within this cerebral framework is the wonderfully complex bundle of contradictions--sexy, brainy, practical--that is Anya, her covetous lover, and the lovestruck writer. And Coetzee manages to pack more in this 225 pages than most authors manage in a thousand.

I hope to hell Coetzee's not sliding into Parkinson paralysis, both for his own sake and for mine. I'm banking on another good twenty or twenty five years, and I'd love to have him in my future.

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## Greg says

The novel is written in three continuous strands. First, a series of short essays. What some people call Occasional Pieces. Second, the story of the writer and the lady. Or what could be called the general plot of the book. And third the perspective of the lady, her observations and narration of the events of strand two and sometimes opinions of strand one, of which she has been hired to type up for the aging author.

Almost every page is split into three sections. Each section corresponding to a different strand.

At first the sections neatly frame each of the strands. But then the sections begin to be less contiguous. Some sections are very short and episodic, some go on stretching for multiple chapters. The chapter lengths decided by the length of the essays. Some stories keeping going on and on. The reader has to make a choice, follow the story or follow the pages.

The reader *must* make a choice. There is no way around it. A *choice* must be made.

Inevitably what the reader chooses implicates him or her into the crime of authorship. The crime of choice, of discrimination. The book I read and gave four stars to could be the same one physically that you read, but the text inevitably would be radically different. There is little chance you could make the same choices I did. The text would be radically different the next time I read this book. There is little chance I would make the same choices again.

I can't help but wonder what the experience would have been to read the book in a different order.

To have read the third section through all of the chapters and then return to read the essays, and finally read the story: what would this book have been? I fear falling into a Borgesian trap with contemplation of all the possible texts contained within this one unassuming book.

How would Coetzee have wanted this book to be read? I mean how did he perceive his perfect reader to read this book, does he still perceive the perfect reader in the same way?

~~Coetzee, the author-writer, remains almost silent on the Question within the confines of the book. To go outside of the book and see what he may have said in an interview, what some scholar or that scholar says and thinks, or what another reviewer states would not answer anything. Instead, merely another layer would be added to the text, a barrier would be erected, even though it was meant to be a bridge meant to cross the abyss of distance between the writer, the book, and the reader.~~

~~Coetzee, the writer, mentions Barthes. He acknowledges the death of the author as figurehead. Of the text as a monolithic totality. Coetzee mentions Foucault.~~

~~By what right do I have to be writing any of this? To be adding my own voice to this book, to any book. To be forcing my way between a person and a book and trying to add my own voice to the resonance of voices. To the white noise of people all trying to add their own nonsense into the din.~~

~~We are all tyrannical authors, at least in our dreams. Most of us are just lazy authors though, and commit our crimes without the labor of creation.~~

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## **Deborah Embury says**

wtf I'm so pissed I even spent money on this book; I had to read it for class and I wish I had rented it so I could return it and never see it again. I'm not even going to bother giving this book a proper review. I wish it was possible to unread something. Don't read "Diary of a Bad Year" unless you want to HAVE a bad year. This book is annoying- everything from its characters to the writing style to the word choice and the DAMN FORMATTING. The plot is senseless and horny and rambling and poorly constructed. In the past, I've only ever had one book I've said I "hated" but this book has just joined that list.

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## **Bookmarks Magazine says**

J. M. Coetzee, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003 and is one of only two writers to win the Booker Prize twice, is clearly not content to rest on his laurels. In fact, most critics consider *Diary of a Bad Year* to be his most ambitious work yet. While the plot itself isn't particularly innovative, the novel's complex narrative structure masterfully weaves multiple voices and viewpoints into a beautifully textured literary counterpoint. There are plenty of layers here: C's biography is, of course, a mirror image of Coetzee's. As a writer nears the end of his career, what opinions has he formed? What does he want from others

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## **brian says**

coetzee, one of the great living writers, has lost his faith in narrative... in the power of fictional characters and situations to illuminate some kind of truth as it pertains to real life. *Elizabeth Costello* was fascinating if only to watch coetzee wrestle with his objections to conventional narrative. *Slow Man*, on the other hand, was just horrible. his first horrible novel. and *Diary of a Bad Year* is somewhere in between. its worst crime, perhaps, is a blandness and breeziness just not acceptable from the guy who wrote *The Life and Times of Michael K* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

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## **Katrine Solvaag says**

If you ever wonder how not to write a book, well, here's your number one example. I'll admit the stylistic choice in and of itself is an intriguing concept, but when 60% of the novel is shoving a grumpy old man's perspective on the world down your throat, 20% is an old male writer ogling a younger woman with several bordering racist and sexist comments, and the rest the most degrading and humiliating representation of a woman's thoughts I've ever encountered, there is no doubt in my mind that this book doesn't even deserve to be returned to a charity shop.

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## **Coioete Flores says**

"E atingi um estágio na minha vida em que começo a me perguntar se eles não têm razão – se, todo o tempo em que achei que circulava disfarçado, na verdade estava nu."

"Nós humanos não fazemos parte da ecologia também e nossa compaixão pelos bichinhos não é um elemento dela tanto quanto a crueldade do corvo?"

"E fica-se grato à Rússia também por colocar diante de nós com uma certeza tão inquestionável o padrão ao qual todo romancista sério deve aspirar, mesmo sem a menor chance de chegar lá: o padrão do mestre Tolstói de um lado e o do mestre Dostoiévski do outro. Com o exemplo deles somos artistas melhores; e com melhores não quero dizer mais hábeis, mas eticamente melhores. Eles aniquilam nossas pretensões mais impuras; eles esclarecem nossa visão; eles fortalecem nosso braço."

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## **Madeline says**

I read this on the recommendation of a friend, who said that she didn't know anyone else who had read the book and wanted to have someone to talk about it with. I had never heard of it, although JM Coetzee does have several books on The List (not this one, unfortunately, but now I at least want to seek out some more of his work). I also realized, looking over my Goodreads shelves, that this is the first book I've read in 2014 that was written by a man. So take that, patriarchy!

The format of *Diary of a Bad Year* is, at first glance, daunting. Each page is divided up into three sections, each representing the viewpoints of a different character. The first section is for the official writings of Senor C, an aging author who is putting together a collection of essays for a book called "Strong Opinions." The

second section is Senor C's personal perspective, describing what occurred while he was working on his essays. The third section is for Anya, the woman Senor C hires as a typist. Coetzee starts out easy, dividing each page into just Senor C's essay and his personal narration, and then gradually adds Anya's perspective to the bottom of the page. The three voices share pages for a while, and then gradually things shift. Senor C's essay sections get shorter as the personal perspectives get longer. Sometimes an essay will extend to the second page, leaving you with a choice that another reviewer phrased beautifully: follow the writing, or follow the story? Reading *Diary of a Bad Year* was, if nothing else, a fun exercise in form, and it's to Coetzee's credit that all three sections remain cohesive and never become too confusing.

My biggest problem with this book was Anya - as a character, she's frustrating. Senor C hires her because he thinks she has a great butt and wants an excuse to spend time with her. Anya is aware of this, and is proud of it. She's portrayed pretty shallowly, always talking about how it's important for her to be attractive to men, and she's in a relationship with an older man who left his wife for Anya. The man, Alan, intrudes on the story halfway through (he has some dumb plan about stealing from Senor C's bank account with computers, I don't know) and soon Anya's perspective becomes overshadowed by Alan's presence. Anya starts out disdainful of Senor C, gently mocking him as a silly and slightly creepy old man, but by the end of the book, she thinks of him only with respect and reverence. Anya seemed less like a character and more like the personification of JM Coetzee's personal wish fulfillment - it's such a cliché, the idea of an older male author wanting some young pretty girl to worship him and his writing, but here it is. It was profoundly irritated to me to see Anya start out looking at Senor C with derision, and end with wide-eyed admiration, especially because he hadn't done anything to earn it.

It's an interesting book, especially in terms of form, and I enjoyed it despite my issues with Anya. I'll have to keep Coetzee in mind the next time I'm looking for a new book, and see if I have a better experience the second time around.

"Of late, sketching stories seems to have become a substitute for writing them. I think of Gyula and his harem of images. It is one of the consequences of growing older that one no longer needs the thing itself, that the idea of the thing suffices - as, in matters of the heart, the entertainment of a possibility, called ideal love by Gyula but more familiar to ordinary people as flirtation, may become a substitute, a not unwelcome substitute, for love itself?"

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## Sawsan says

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## Serbay GÜL says

Coetsee'ye olan hayranl??m giderek büyümekte. Okudu?um en ilginç yap?daki kitaplardand?. Çok farklı bir teknikle aynı anda aslında üç ayrı hikaye okumu? oluyorsunuz. Her sayfa? 3 çizgiyle birbirinden ayrılm?? durumda ve ister bu 3 çizgiyi ayrı ayrı okuyabilir ,isterseniz aynı anda ilerleyebilirsiniz. Yine de sayfalar?n ikinci ve üçüncü bölümleri diyebilece?im k?s?mlar? birlikte okumakta fayda var.

Baş kahraman?m?z olan yazardan 'Çarp?c? Fikirler' adlı kitap için yaz? yazmas?n? isterler. Aynı farklı yazar?n katkıda bulundu?u bir kitap olacakt?r. Ya??n?n ilerlemi? olması dolay?s?yla Filipinli kom?usunda ses kay?tlar?na daktilo yoluyla yaz?ya dökmesi üzerine i? teklifinde bulunur ve kad?n i?i kabul eder ve kitap bu şekilde başlar.

Başta bahsetti?im gibi sayfalar?n birinci bölümü , sanat , müzik , dünya siyaseti hakkında ele?tirel ve sivri yaz?lardan oluşan köşe yaz?lardır. İkinci bölümler yazar?n , daktilocu üzerinde düşünceleri ve diyaloglar? , üçüncü bölümde daktilocu k?z?n a?z?ndan e?iyle ve yazarla arasında geçen diyalog ve gözlemler üzerinedir.

Beni fazlasıyla tatmin eden bir kitap oldu. Bir süre sonra mutlaka yine elimime alacaktım.

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## Atram\_sinprisa says

Probablemente, el libro más original que nunca haya leído. El planteamiento de tres relatos simultáneos no siempre es fácil, pero el conjunto es una delicia.



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## Barbara Wahl says

### Abilissimi lettori (gli altri).

Rinuncio! Ero affascinata dalla struttura del testo organizzato su tre livelli, quello dei saggi veri e propri ai quali si aggiungono - senza nesso apparente - in fondo alla pagina, separati da una riga, due ...come chiamarli..interventi? riflessioni, monologhi? di due personaggi che si incrociano, si conoscono, forse avranno una loro storia, non lo saprò...

Rinuncio perché ho provato tutti modi di lettura,invano:

primo tentativo: leggo solo i saggi, interessantissimi e non mi lascio distrarre. Niente da fare, il mio occhio, più veloce della mia volontà, coglie una frase sotto, la legge, si chiede, ma...che succede, interrompo il saggio. E va bene,

secondo tentativo: leggo la "storia sotto le righe". Sì, all'inizio funziona, quel tale che va in lavanderia, vede una donna, ma molto presto, si aggiunge la donna, che racconta dal suo punto di vista,e dialoga pure con il suo uomo... sono ad un bivio, devo scegliere: leggo lui o lei?

D'accordo, leggo tutti e due, tanto sono insieme in fondo alla pagina, ma , dopo poche pagine, mi accorgo che non va, il filo si spezza continuamente, ad ogni pagina. Ricomincio dal

terzo tentativo: prendo lui e vado in sequenza fino alla fine. Vi dico che non funziona, mi manca la versione di lei...

Suppongo che potrei trovare altre combinazioni.

Rimango ammirata dalla tecnica e nello stesso tempo frustrata dalla mia scarsa capacità di lettore; rimpiango un poco il geniale Perec che racconta molteplici storie raggruppate in diversi capitoli.

All'ammirazione per Coetzee, ora, si aggiunge quella per i suoi abilissimi lettori.

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## Fatma says

never again

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## Lukáš Palán says

Boa noite.

J.M. Coetzee, vyslovuje se Já Mám Kozy, vyhrál Nobelovku a tak jsem si řekl, že si na něj posvítím. To byl vcelku dobrý nápad, protože dokud jsem nerozsvítil lampičku, tak jsem nic neviděl!

Hihhi.

Deník je sbírka esejů a postřehů o všem možným, od historie Austrálie, až po US politiku a dopisy fanoušků. Zároveň je o tom, jak jeden starší dědula tyto postřehy souběžně píše, přičemž je mladá buchtíkka od něj z paneláku překládá a taky o tom píše. Každá stránka je tedy rozdělená na esej, jeho pohled, její pohled, časová to lineární není a tak jsem si chvílemi připadal, jako bych vypil moc jaggermajstra. V jeden moment jsem se tak zmátl, že jsem si dokonce prdl nahlas před člověkem, což jsem udělal poprvé od roku 2003. Tehdy jsem nevěděl, že je Jana v místnosti.

I proto, že mi knihy p?ipomn?la tuto temnou hodinu mého života, musím jít s hodnocením na pouhých 5/10, tudíž kniha není lepší než t?eba autobusy, které hodnotím 6/10.

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## Stop says

Read the STOP SMILING review of *Diary of a Bad Year*:

J. M. Coetzee is a bit of a recluse — he persistently denies interviews and was not present at either of the Booker Prize award ceremonies held in his honor. For a man whose written word is so eloquent, he is famously tight-lipped in person. “A colleague who has worked with him for more than a decade claims to have seen him laugh just once,” said fellow South African Rian Malan in a *New Statesmen* article. “An acquaintance has attended several dinner parties where Coetzee has uttered not a single word.” But one of the powerful suggestions made by Coetzee’s crafty new novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*, is a fundamental distinction between words that last and words that fade — literature falling in the former camp and timely opinions into the latter. *Diary* reveals a mind concerned with writerly comportment, sketching an ideal model of the author not as society’s bellwether or prophet, but rather as an artist with designs on the eternal.

Read the complete STOP SMILING review...

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## Fabian says

J. M. Coetzee may just be the only living contemporary writer that actually gets better & better with age. (An anomaly if there ever was one...). Against the very paradigms that cemented him as a worthy premiere multi-award recipient celebrity writer in the first place, Coetzee is an astonishing artist. Validation of the writer seems to be Coetzee's most recent and compelling theme. With "Elizabeth Costello" (his magnum opus in my view) we reached the heavens (!). In "Summertime" we delved into the inner realms of not all writers, just this singular one, Coetzee. But when coming upon the "How Can I Possibly Contribute Something New to My Art" Rubicon, what does Coetzee do? Tie up more loose ends that sums up his own poetics\*, while making the reader's experience a refreshingly new one. The continuity of this top-notch intuition (which has made its way in the more recent books by the South African) transforms the writer's life into the body of work itself. That is, it lives on... with brilliance, with raw nerve. This is why if you haven't read any of his books (all of 'em are "great"-to-"absolutely perfect" in rating) please start soon (& all of 'em are brief).

In this mesmerizing and intrepid fiction, three or more events are occurring simultaneously. The trick is pulled off brilliantly--and you know this because it has never been done in this way before.

Instead of gimmicky, I feel that all these writerly acrobatics actually bring us closer and closer to a more profound and concrete Truth that had not til today seemed possible. (Both the Question and the Answer.)

\*the Otherness as adversary ("Disgrace"), physical deterioration ("Slow Man"), intellectual dignity ("E. Costello") to name a handful.

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## Audrey says

I was slightly dismayed to find that this is one of those books which manipulates the reader with strange page arrangements and multiple points of view, but I was soon drawn into the story. In fact, it is suspenseful, thought-provoking, and quite interesting. Maybe it is a story about relationships; between men and women, between youth and age, between ideas and emotions, between prose and essay, between reader and author. Well, I'm not the first person to say that Coetzee is a great original writer but I'm happy to join the throng.

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## Aryn says

Well, that was **interesting**.

This entire book is told in **three** distinct voices. The first voice is that of an author's book of opinions on the state of the world. It really does make the book feel **both fiction and non-fiction**. The second voice is that of the author himself, talking about his "life" outside of the book he is writing - his actual Diary. The third voice is that of his secretary/typist, Anya, who is transcribing the book for the author, who she calls Senor C - *her* actual Diary.

The book that the author is writing makes him come across as overly intelligent, smug, and rather douchebaggish. Anya is super attractive and comes across as perhaps **not the brightest lightbulb in the box**. As the book goes on, you can see in all three story lines how all the characters change, become more open, more intelligent, etc.

It was a pretty interesting way to show how deeply someone can be affected by only one different person in their life, for maybe only a year. Moments from Anya's Diary, where she talks of telling Senor C something, can show up in an attitude or a line from the book that Senor is writing. Whereas Senor's attitude towards Anya tends to change her so that she becomes more positive about herself.

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