

J.M. Coetzee

Interview with Voiceless

“Steadily, and not so slowly anymore, we are making progress. One day, not in our lifetime perhaps, but in a future that is not unforeseeable, animals of nonhuman species will be born into a world in which they stand a fair chance of living a life that is happy by their own standards and fulfilling.”

- JM Coetzee *

What inspired you to write *The Lives of Animals*?

Every year the Centre for Human Values at Princeton University sponsors two lectures by someone prominent in the world of ideas. It also invites four experts to come along and comment on the lectures. When I was invited to give the lectures, in 1999, I was at once struck by the fact that the word “human” was redundant in the Centre’s title. There are no such thing as animal values: the moral norms we try to uphold with respect to animals, like not treating them with gratuitous cruelty, are values formulated by human beings. The two lectures I delivered were implicitly directed at this anomaly.

Language is powerful. How can fiction play a vital role in exploring real world issues?

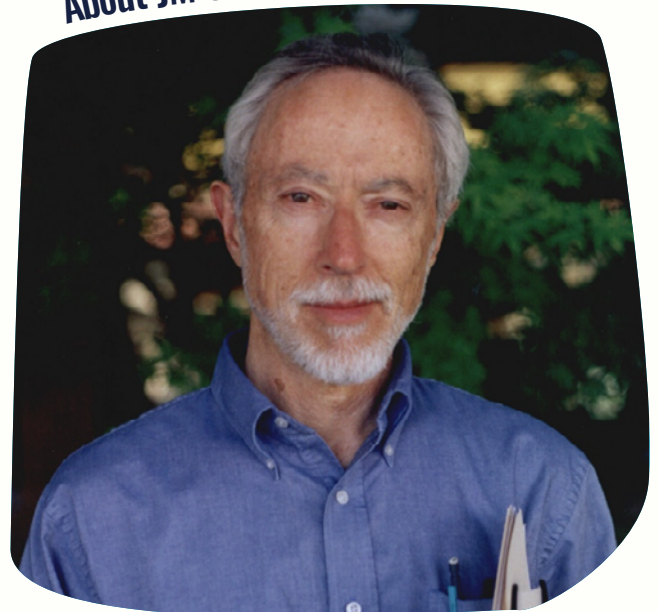
Works of fiction, whether novels or plays or films, have a long and proud history of providing us with avenues by which to explore real-world issues, and specifically the human dimension of real-world issues.

* from a speech for the exhibition opening of ‘Voiceless: I feel therefore I am’, Sherman Galleries, Thursday 22 February 2007.

The Lives of Animals addresses the challenging subject matter of animal rights. Why did you choose this subject matter to explore?

Strictly speaking, *The Lives of Animals* does not address the subject of animal rights. Instead it addresses the question of how we human beings treat animals, and in specific explores the state of mind (or state of soul) of a person – Elizabeth Costello – who is deeply affected by the spectacle of how animals are treated.

About JM Coetzee



John M Coetzee is a novelist and literary critic. He is a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, a two-time winner of the Booker Prize and winner of the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in the 2010 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards. Coetzee has two honours degrees, and has taught English literature at the State University of New York, Buffalo and the University of Cape Town where he was the Distinguished Professor of Literature between 1999 and 2001. He also holds ten honorary doctorates. Coetzee is the author of numerous novels (*Disgrace*, *Elizabeth Costello*), fictional autobiographies and non-fiction publications. He is an animal protection advocate and Voiceless patron.