Intersections of Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics: Coetzee, Beckett, and Kafka

Eric Paul Meljac
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/201
STUDENT HAS RESTRICTED ACCESS TO FULL TEXT OF THE DISSERTATION.

ONLY COVER PAGES AND ABSTRACT ARE AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME
INTERSECTIONS OF AESTHETICS, ETHICS, AND POLITICS:
COETZEE, BECKETT, AND KAFKA

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Eric Paul Meljac
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2013
We hereby approve the dissertation of

Eric Paul Meljac

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

David Downing, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

Mike Sell, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Brian Macaskill, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Title: Intersections of Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics: Coetzee, Beckett, and Kafka

Author: Eric Paul Meljac

Dissertation Chair: Dr. David Downing

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Mike Sell
                                          Dr. Brian Macaskill

Since the Enlightenment, the realms of aesthetics, ethics, and politics have often been separated into isolated areas of study. Art and literature were often viewed in a post-Kantian light as disinterested and transcendent, rising above the material complications of the ethical and political worlds. But there have also been significant counter-movements to these dominant forms of aesthetic idealism. In the twentieth century, literary giants such as Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett began tackling issues of ethics and politics directly in narrative form.

In the contemporary period after World War II, South African, turned Australian, Nobel laureate, J. M. Coetzee, taking cue from the aesthetic, ethical, and political gestures of Kafka and Beckett, began to directly challenge the ethical and political with his fiction. Novels such as Elizabeth Costello and Diary of a Bad Year deal with various ethical and political events, from the Gulf War to justice for animals. In his fiction, Coetzee utilizes the models of his forbearers—Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett—sometimes even borrowing their allegories, in order to challenge the socio-political and neoliberal policies and events that face the contemporary reader. Indeed, it is in his novels (his aesthetics) that Coetzee deals with the ethical and political hegemonies that dominate contemporary life. Coetzee follows in direct succession from Kafka and Beckett, reinforcing their models and explaining existence in a violent, and socially perverse, world.