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

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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

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
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Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

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

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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.