



Youth

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

J. M. Coetzee, a well-known prize winning writer, turns his attention to his own life in *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II*, his second memoir. In his first memoir, *Boyhood* (1997), Coetzee relates his early years in South Africa. *Youth* opens with the young Coetzee planning his move to London, a move that represents a rejection of and escape from his family and all things South African. When he arrives in the city, however, he finds himself no more able to fit in to English life than he was able to find a niche in South Africa. Intending to write a thesis on the works of Ford Maddox Ford, he instead finds himself working for IBM in the suburbs.

Set in the 1960's, *Youth* offers a portrait that is neither flattering nor endearing. Choosing to use a third-person narrator, Coetzee distances himself from his younger self, using language that is both spare and revealing. The narrator is at times vain, considering himself the intellectual superior of those around him, and at times pathetic, unable to overcome his isolation and his fear of commitment to other people. As he writes, "If he were a warmer person he would no doubt find it all easier: life, love poetry. But warmth is not in his nature." In particular, the narrator's lack of warmth as a lover troubles both himself and the reader. Further, although the reader knows that Coetzee eventually finds himself, the book closes without optimism for the future, as the narrator bleakly asserts that the "ambulance men" he foresees coming to cart away his friend Ganapathy "might as well come and fetch him too."

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/youth-j-m-coetzee-salem>