A new collection of essays and literary criticism from Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee

In addition to being one of the most acclaimed and accomplished fiction writers in the world, J. M. Coetzee is also a literary critic of the highest caliber. As Derek Attridge observes in his illuminating introduction, reading Coetzee’s nonfiction offers one the opportunity to see how an author at the forefront of his profession engages with his peers, not as a critic from the outside, but as one who works with the same raw materials. In this collection of twenty recent pieces, Coetzee examines the work of some of the twentieth century’s greatest writers—from Samuel Beckett and Günter Grass to Gabriel García Márquez and Philip Roth. Brilliantly insightful, challenging, yet accessible, these essays demonstrate Coetzee’s sharp eye and unwavering critical acumen and will be of interest to his many fans as well as to all readers of international literature.

My Personal Review:
This bundle of essays contains superb reviews of important authors and (part of) their work. Hereafter, a brief summary of Coetzee's comments and evaluations, with a few remarks.

Italo Svevo considered himself as a peer, a fellow researcher of Freud into the grip of the unconscious on conscious life. Robert Musil (Young Törless) was skeptical of the power of reason to guide human conduct. Robert Walzer (Jakob von Gunten) considered himself as a `Man von Unten' (an underdog).
Bruno Schulz's book 'Cinnamon Shops' is a recreation of childhood consciousnesses, full of terror, obsessions and crazy glories. Joseph Roth's 'The Radetzky March' is a great poem of elegy to Habsburg Austria. Sándor Márai considered himself as a dupe of history. He behaved like a caricature of the bourgeois intellectual, scorning the rabble of the right and the left. Günter Grass's 'Crabwalk' should be considered a breakthrough, as war crimes against Germans during WW II are not taboo anymore. Graham Greene's 'Brighton Rock' is a confrontation between religious Good and Evil and materialist right and wrong. For Saul Bellow, literature is an interpretation of the chaos of life. Philip Roth's 'The Plot against America' paints a vision of a world based on hatred and suspicion, a world of them and us. Nadine Gordimer's 'The Pickup' is a dismissal of the false gods of the West, the gods of market capital. Gabriel García Márquez's so-called magic realism is simply a matter of telling hard-to-believe stories. For V.S. Naipaul, self-denial is the road of weakness. J.M. Coetzee pierces the veil of Walt Whitman's amativeness. Whitman's democracy is a civic religion energized by a broadly erotic feeling. J.M. Coetzee gives brilliant comments on translation problems for hermetic poetry (Paul Celan). Hermetic poetry seems to be mostly, as it is here, more puzzle work than poetry. I only disagree with the author's review of Samuel Beckett's work. Here I side with another Nobel Prize winner, Naguib Mahfuz (Adrift on the Nile).

This book is a must read for all lovers of world literature. Of course, one should read most of the books reviewed in these essays.