The first comprehensive biography of the Nobel laureate. Biographer J.C. Kannemeyer had the cooperation of Coetzee himself who provided him with private papers and gave him access to his manuscripts.

In spite of his world-wide eminence as a novelist and a literary scholar, the Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee has not thus far been the subject of a comprehensive biography. For J.M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing, J.C. Kannemeyer, well-known for his two-volume history of Afrikaans literature, and the author of six extensive biographies of Afrikaans authors, had the cooperation of Coetzee himself, who granted him interviews and put him in touch with family, friends and colleagues who could supply information about events in the author’s life. Coetzee also provided him with copies of comprehensive documentation in his private possession, and granted him access to the manuscripts of his novels that are due to be permanently lodged at the University of Texas at Austin later this year. Apart from the information gathered through these channels, Kannemeyer also made a study of the enormous body of literature on Coetzee, and through archival research unearthed further information not hitherto accessed.

The book starts on an exploration of Coetzee’s genealogy, followed by a chronicling of his childhood in Cape Town and Worcester and his visits to the family farm Voëlfontein belonging to his grandfather, where his love of the barren expanses of the Great Karoo was born. After an account of his schooling, the biography traces Coetzee’s career through his student days at the University of Cape Town and his years as a computer programmer in Britain. After this, he studied for his doctorate at the University of Texas in Austin, followed by three years as a lecturer at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Here he enjoyed an excellent relationship with his colleagues and students, but was also, through nightly newscasts on television, exposed to the daily horrors of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. His participation in a peaceful protest against the presence of police on the Buffalo campus led to the refusal of his application for a visa for an extended stay in the country, obliging him to return to the country of his birth.

Upon his return in 1971, Coetzee was appointed as a lecturer in English at the University of Cape Town, where for the next thirty years he enjoyed an illustrious academic career, encompassing also repeated spells as a visiting professor at American universities, and many lectures and readings at a wide variety of conferences and institutions. In 1974 his debut novel, Dusklands, appeared, followed by a number of novels that established him as a leading English-language novelist, inspiring a whole industry of critical commentaries and studies. His novels were not limited to a specifically South African set of issues, but did draw attention, among other themes, to the iniquities of apartheid and the perpetuation of colonialism in constricting master-slave relationships. Coetzee’s novels are written in a crystalline, stripped prose, lending themselves to translation and critical recognition in all known and many unknown languages.
For the first time this biography introduces information about an author into the public domain known for only very exceptionally granting interviews to journalists, and not readily discussing his private life. The biographer had the opportunity to correct many of the misconceptions still prevailing on the internet and elsewhere, and to provide information shedding light on the genesis and implications of the novels. All in all, this biography is an indispensable source for everybody concerned with the work of J.M. Coetzee.

**Praise for J.M. Coetzee; A Life in Writing:**

'A major new biography.’ – *Telegraph*****

‘Essential for all who want to read more about Coetzee’s life and work.’ – Arnon Grunberg

‘In this masterly biography of John Coetzee, one of the world’s greatest living writers, Kannemeyer ends the myth that the author of *Disgrace* is a coward. With surprising analyzes of the novels J.C. Kannemeyer shows that Coetzee was an engaged writer from the start. But that his opinions where too painful to accept for most people. Coetzee could have wished for a better biographer. Contemporaries, both from ancient Afrikaner descent. Sharing their love for the Cape and both have devoted most of their lives to literature. Like no other, Kannemeyer was able to reveal the South African roots, influenced by Dostoevski, T.S. Elliot, Beckett, Kafka, Ezra Pound and many other classical writers. Not the details of his private life but the connections that are made with his novels through insightful analysis give this book its meaning. Almost everything Coetzee has written can be related to his own experiences. By placing his work in the context of his literary inspirations and the political situations he was reflecting on, Kannemeyer shows us how engaged Coetzee's writing always has been. This fascinating study forces us to read and reread the book of Coetzee.’ – *NRC Handelsblad*****

‘Kannemeyer’s biography delineates an impressive portrait, not just of Coetzee as a writer but also of Coetzee as a man. *A Life in Writing* is a meeting between two monuments of South African literature. Kannemeyer is an authority on African literature and arguably the greatest biographer of the country. J.M. Coetzee is by far the most important writer of his generation and a world class author. Through countless documents, letters and interviews, with Coetzee and his peers, Kannemeyer takes us deep into the heart of his subject. This is remarkable and surprising. We trust the biographer and follow the story that remains interesting. We get a look behind the scenes. The biography reveals facts that hadn't been well-known. And the biographer can’t be accused of sensationalism or cheap journalism. The facts are stated serenely and honest.’ – *De Standaard*****

‘Of all contemporary writers, J.M. Coetzee might seem the least likely to oblige a biographer, especially since he has now published three superb novelized memoirs of his own, gathered as *Scenes from Provincial Life*. But when J.C. Kannemeyer, a professor of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch university, approached him for that purpose in 2008, he co-operated unstintingly. He made his papers available and was interviewed by Kannemeyer for a fortnight, answering questions about his life as objectively as possible, although as always declining to interpret his work. His major concern was that the data be factually correct. The book that has resulted, originally written in Afrikaans and now brought out here by a new UK offshoot of an Australian independent publisher, is a valuable document.’ – *The Standard*

**J.C. Kannemeyer** (1939-2011) was an authority on African Literature and wrote several biographies on African writers. For his biographies and literary essays he won countless awards and an honorary doctorate from the Stellenbosch University. He died shortly after finishing his biography on J.M. Coetzee.