



“Not the story you wanted to hear:” reading chick-lit in J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime*

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ABSTRACT

J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime* has been widely explored – both for its controversy and merits – as engaging in “acts of genre” where the inscription of an autobiographical narrative simultaneously serves as a metatextual and ideological critique of its form. Similarly, this article is intrigued by generic instability, but our terrain lies further afield, exploring how the narrative lapses from the lofty ideal of romance to the baser “truth” of chick-lit. In *Summertime*, all the female characters besmirch Mr. Vincent, the biographer, for wanting to cast John Coetzee in the role of a romantic hero. Yet, their resistance results in a series of romantic failures which then situates *Summertime* in the generic ambit of chick-lit. In embodying a spirit that is as playful as it is critical, we suggest that Coetzee offers an opportunity to cast aside a literary critical tradition of suspicion and, in doing so, passes critical comment on how we approach a popular genre like chick-lit.

KEYWORDS

J.M. Coetzee; *Summertime*; chick-lit; Coetzee’s women

This is not the story you wanted to hear, is it? You wanted a different kind of story for your book. You wanted to hear of the romance between your hero and the beautiful foreign ballerina. Well, I am not giving you romance, I am giving you the truth. Maybe too much truth.

Summertime, 185

Compelling, Funny, Moving and Full of Life.

Blurb review¹

A dazzling urban satire of modern human relations? An ironic, tragic insight into the demise of the nuclear family? Or the confused ramblings of a pissed thirty-something?

Blurb review²

In 2009, J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime* arrived as the final instalment of his “autobiographical” trilogy subtitled *Scenes from Provincial Life*. Yet, *Summertime* departs radically from the third person, present tense narrative style of its predecessors, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, as the framing device of the posthumous biography performs an increased splintering of the “autos” of the autobiography with postmodern flamboyance. Unsurprisingly, the trilogy has been widely explored – both for its controversy and merits – as engaging in “acts of