Tenderness is Peril

An interview with **Maja Kleczewska** by Dorota Semenowicz

Adriana Nascimento, a character from Coetzee's *Summertime,* says that if Coetzee was a man capable of taking action, "she could have allowed herself to be weak, an ordinary, weak woman." In contrast to male characters, female characters in Coetzee's books are firmly rooted in the world. I felt that they were, finally, not described from the perspective of a man, reduced to erotic relationships, but that it was they who arranged and organised the worlds of men.

I get the impression that this male perspective is still present here, only in a slightly different way. Lust, passion and women's physiology in Coetzee's books create an attractive, but also a scary scenery.

Do you not think that these power relations are a bit unusual? Women overwhelm the main character who defends himself against them by withdrawing.

Above all, Coetzee introduces us to a field of private experience. It seems that through his female characters, the writer discovers himself. They are creatures – beings that emerge more from Coetzee's imagination than from reality.

Even in the autobiographical *Youth*?

Everywhere. Dealing with them is always accompanied by great anxiety, fear that if you really meet them, they will devour you; they will either destroy your world, or absorb it completely. After all, in *Slow Man* Elisabeth Costello brings total destabilisation into Paul's world. In Coetzee's writings, women are carriers of danger, or possibly of guilty conscience, if they are not treated as they should be. Even Paul's planned meeting with the blind Marijana shares this nature. It also appears to be harmful, abusive, a violation of intimacy. You get the impression that contact with women is not liberating and fascinating, but creates dread and terror. A very valuable book for me in this context is *In the Heart of the Country*. The book prompts and brings closure to a secret, which we cannot access in *Slow Man* - the secret of a blind person and her desire. Marijana wants