

JM Coetzee urges men to become teachers

Renowned South African author and Nobel literature laureate Prof JM Coetzee on Monday (10 December) urged young male graduates to consider a career in education.

"It's good for children to have a man's hand guiding them, and it is also good for you," he said in Johannesburg at the University of the Witwatersrand, which was conferring on him an honorary doctorate in literature.

"What a relief it is to see so many young men among graduates in the humanities. What a relief that men have not entirely abandoned a field which they once used to dominate," he said.

Coetzee said that although he had been taught by phenomenal women throughout his life, he was certain the presence of male figures would have enriched the experience.

"It has nothing to do with personal qualities, but if there had sometimes been a male presence in the classroom, the experience would have been different and I am convinced, fuller."

Coetzee warned against placing the responsibility of teaching children in the hands of a single sex.

Coetzee urged male graduates to meet the country's need for hardworking, dedicated and well-humoured teachers.

"Look upon it as a challenge. Let us be a generation of young teachers who will transform schools and make them a place of intellectual excitement where children can't wait to get to," he said.

He told the young women in the crowd they had been the backbone of the teaching profession for many years. He spoke against the "suspicious eye" cast on men who expressed an interest in young children.

Coetzee was born in South Africa, but now lives in Adelaide, South Australia.

His professional career includes appointments at the University of Cape Town, the University of Chicago, and visiting appointments at Harvard University, John Hopkins University and Stanford University.

His fictional works include *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which won the CNA Literary Award.

He won the Booker Prize for the first time for his novel *Life and Times of Michael K* and for the second time with *Disgrace*.

He has won many other literary prizes including the Lannan Award for Fiction, the Jerusalem Prize and The Irish Times

International Fiction Prize.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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