Coetzee’s speech is a lesson in bravery

WHAT a surprise it was to read how “baffled and bemused” the audience at the Wits graduation ceremony was on hearing JM Coetzee’s address (“JM Coetzee stumps Wits”, December 11).

Some of them were arrogant in the extreme, “flabbergasted” by his choice of subject: teaching in primary schools as a career for young people, especially young men.

Education has long needed a champion of Coetzee’s stature.

How interesting it was then to read an edited version of the same speech. How courageous of a man of Coetzee’s intellect to use his opportunity to express such wisdom at such a critical time in graduate students’ lives and our country’s history. He elevated the idea of a teaching career in primary schools to the level that it deserves and seldom receives.

It is good for everybody’s souls “to be with small children”.

I applaud Coetzee for choosing this important subject for his address when he received his doctorate in literature. Never has our country needed his message more. Thank you. — Lesley Satchel, Knysna

THE Department of Basic Education applauds JM Coetzee for his speech. He placed the education of children and the role of men in teaching and learning at the centre of his speech. This he did in a country where teaching is not valued and is often scorned as a woman’s occupation that is inappropriate for men.

That he did this to the dismay of many commentators testifies to his courage and perspicacity in grasping the central challenges of our country today. Viva, JM Coetzee, viva. — Mzi Khala, Department of Basic Education, by e-mail