Second Call for Expressions of Interest

J. M. Coetzee’s appearance at the “Samuel Beckett: Out of the Archive” conference in York this June is a timely point to reconsider the dynamics of what Coetzee, one of the more challenging of Beckett’s literary heirs, himself has called ‘literary paternity’ by means of a one-day conference. The organizers are happy to invite expressions of interest from the academic community at large to participate in the symposium to be held at the University of Leeds on the 28th June.

Our subtitle, “Coetzee and His Precursors”, itself upholds this principle of textual reconsideration, alluding to one of Coetzee’s most prominent creative influences, Franz Kafka. In his essay ‘Kafka and His Precursors’, Borges writes:

In critical vocabulary, the word precursor is indispensable, but one should attempt to purify it of all connotation of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His labour modifies our conception of the past, as it has to modify the future.

The relevance of this to Coetzee’s fiction is profound: because of and through his writing, Coetzee’s more recognizable sources—among which Beckett, Cavafy, Defoe, Dostoevsky, Eliot, Joyce, Kafka, Keats, Nabokov, Pound, Rilke—have come to receive both renewed attention and significant reconsideration. The aim of the symposium is thus to consider the impact Coetzee’s creative reworking of these and other writers has on our readings of them.

For that reason, the organizers have brought together outstanding scholars and translators of Coetzee’s work to speak, in ‘countervoice’ with the delegates, about their views on this theme and the interesting implications and new terrain it presents. Each speaker has been asked to prepare a 5-10 minute presentation, abstracts of which will be distributed among the delegates prior to the conference. The delegates will then be expected to respond to the speakers’ points, drawing on their own work and range of creative and critical sources. Delegates will not be required to submit paper abstracts or deliver papers. Rather, delegates will be expected to respond to the presentations as opportunities to generate truly collaborative knowledge, generated itself in the dialogue of different minds thinking to a single purpose. Moving away from the traditional speaker-centred papers approach, we envisage a polyphonic delegate-driven engagement with the specific ideas generated by the speaker.

To this end, we are asking prospective delegates to prepare 250-300 word biographies that include mapping out their interests in Coetzee and his precursors. Postgraduate students and early career scholars are particularly encouraged to apply. Successful applicants will be notified within a fortnight. Biographies should be sent to the conference email address: coetzeeandhisprecursors@gmail.com by no later than Friday the 13th May, 2011 (note extended deadline). Further questions are welcomed at this address as well. More information will regularly be communicated on coetzeeandhisprecursors.wordpress.com.

Organizing committee:

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