

## **Nobel Prize in Literature 1994**



**Kenzaburo Oe**

**The Nobel Prize in Literature 1994 was awarded to Kenzaburo Oe *"who with poetic force creates an imagined world, where life and myth condense to form a disconcerting picture of the human predicament today"*.**

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Kenzaburo Oe, now 59 years old, is Japanese, the scion of a prominent samurai family. He was born on the island of Shikoku in the south-west, but graduated from the University of Tokyo, where he studied literature until 1958. His published works include novels, short stories and essays.

Oe stresses that he writes for a Japanese readership, implying that he has scant expectation of reaching readers in other countries. His studies, however, took on a Western slant and he has been influenced strongly by the culture of the West. Among the writers he mentions are Dante, Rabelais, Balzac, Poe, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, and, not least, Sartre, whose anti-heroes and existentialist deliberations have played a significant role for him. He

describes his own way of writing as grotesque realism and readily cites the name of Rabelais in this context.

Japan's capitulation after the dropping of the atomic bombs in 1945, when the Emperor - a divine personage - descended to the people and spoke in a human voice, was a shocking experience for the young Oe. The humiliation took a firm grip on him and has coloured much of his work. He himself describes his writing as a way of exorcising demons.

In the imagined world he has created, he succeeds in portraying the qualities humanity shares by intensifying what is individual. This is true in particular of his work since the 1960's, when he had the experience of becoming the father of a brain-damaged son. This is the event that provides the background in reality of "A personal matter" (1964).

The novel "The silent cry" (1967) is one of Oe's major works. At first glance it appears to concern an unsuccessful revolt, but fundamentally the novel deals with people's relationships with each other in a confusing world in which knowledge, passions, dreams, ambitions and attitudes merge into each other.

The work most recently translated into Swedish is "M/T and the narrative about the marvels of the forest"(1986), the Swedish translation (1992). The capital M in the title stands for "the matriarch", and T for "the trickster". In the course of the novel these anthropological types are embodied in different incarnations. This is done in short numbered paragraphs which, in their way, reflect the character of the work. The writer's major theme reappears, and towards the end of the novel his son Hikari is depleted in a new light.

"Lettres aux années de nostalgie" (translated into French in 1993 but not yet available in English) is a form of autobiographical novel with Dante as its mentor. In its protagonist, Frère- Gii, Oe has created a character who achieves his dream of never leaving the village in the forest on his native island of Shikoku. In one way, the novel is a reversal of the previous one in its projection of the fantasy on to childhood. The two works are each remarkable in themselves, but they also form the first two parts of a planned trilogy in which the third has been provisionally titled "The fiery green tree". In this magnificent



project, Oe binds together his principal concerns: the marvels of the forest, the inhumanity of cities and his disabled son's paradoxical riches. There is a common denominator.

***For more details please visit:***

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