

Jacques Chessex

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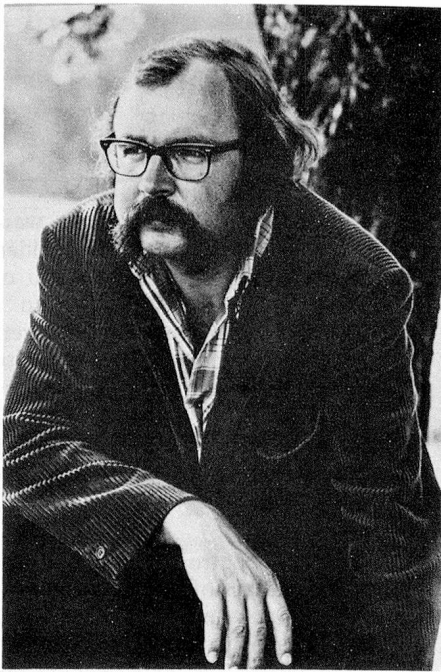
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Jacques Chessex

Prize for 1973 awarded by the Academy of Goncourt

When the Academy of Goncourt awarded Jacques Chessex the most famous and most coveted Prize for French Literature, it crowned far more than the novel "L'Ogre" (man-eating giant). For the author who celebrates his 40th birthday this year, can look back already on prolific writing and success in abundance, although there is no doubt that he stands only at the threshold of his most significant publications.

For exactly 20 years, Chessex has been devoting himself with heart and soul to his vocation. Right at the beginning, he wrote poetry, and later he found his talent reached also into the field of prose. Already when his first volumes of poetry were published ("Une voix dans la nuit", "Batailles dans l'air"), one could be certain that he was a creative artist who would achieve great things. Riches, power and quality of style, a marked preference for nature and human beings, liberal opposition hurtful to solitude and death – all these elements are significant for Chessex's world. We find them from their beginnings to the highest point of development. This work, formal in its pretension and at the same time rich in personal experience, is alive with everything which fills man with enthusiasm and pain. Chessex refutes all artificial experience in order to open himself up to real human feelings.

Two tales ("La tête ouverte" and "La confession du Pasteur Burg") give insight into the considerable talents of Chessex in the field of the novel. In addition, Chessex, in creating poetically the tragic fate of a Calvinist pastor, got nearer to one of his most important

themes shown even more explicitly in "L'Ogre". The tragedy of a man, imprisoned in a way of life full of defeats and mistakes, who, for this reason, cannot grasp life which presents itself to him in the person of a woman.

In the "Portrait des Vaudois" and "Carabas", Chessex has enriched his own life and at the same time his vocabulary and has demonstrated decisively that he is absolutely capable of asserting himself in the realm of literature.

These two books are written in a fresh and captivating style and overflow with strength, humour and a thousand echos from the earth. Not only have they established the author right at the top in French literature in Switzerland, but attracted the attention of the critics in Paris. It is known that he is not at all anxious to be acknowledged outside Switzerland. With "L'Ogre", Jacques Chessex has become renowned in one go.

It is his first novel, a beautiful and exciting work in which life and death, love and fear, man and nature and the sin of the flesh get involved and resolved. It is with pleasure that we discover the

survival of the poet and that the writer of prose has not destroyed the author's poetic soul. On the contrary, the novel becomes a moving song.

The Goncourt Academicians went to Lausanne to hand over the symbolic cheque to their prize-winner – the award so many authors dream of . . .

Jacques Chessex's fame, however, has not altered him. Naturally we was justifiably delighted, but he has remained easy-going and of a serenity which has surprised his associates. After having allowed interviews, parties and ceremonies with good nature, he returned to his town, his classes, his friends, his cafés and above all to his next work.

That is the only thing which really matters to him: The time when one is alone with one's joy and one's worries and when, at a moment of highest tension, a new book comes to life. This book on which Chessex is working at present and in which we shall find between the brilliant lines humanity in all its misery and splendour.

Henri-Charles Tauxe



Jacques Chessex, the first Swiss to receive the Goncourt Award, thanks writers Pierre Sabatier and Françoise Mallet-Joris, of the Goncourt Academy, at prize giving ceremony in Lausanne.



Lausanne, scene of Chessex's novel "l'Ogre".