NADINE GORDIMER (1923 – )

Nadine Gordimer is a preeminent South African writer and activist. Born in Springs, Transvaal, South Africa to Jewish immigrants, Gordimer was briefly educated at a Catholic school for girls, but eventually pulled out of formal schooling by her mother. She spent a year at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 1945, and has lived in Johannesburg since 1948. Gordimer has two children: a daughter, Oriane, and a son, Hugo. Gordimer’s second husband, Reinhold Cassirer, passed away in 2001. Gordimer’s prolific output of novels, short stories, essays, and drama has garnered her numerous literary awards, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, as well as honorary degrees from several universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.

Gordimer’s first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), is set in her hometown, and South Africa often serves as the backdrop to her work. Gordimer fervently opposed the apartheid regime and has been a member of the African National Congress since the 1970s, even when doing so was illegal. Her novels often center on issues of identity and self-awareness, particularly of female protagonists, amidst turbulent social forces.Her short stories are written in a modernist style similar to Ernest Hemingway: she does not provide solutions to social problems; rather, she presents vivid glimpses of experience that often shock a reader into contemplation. The surreal short story “Loot,” for example, reveals a cryptic commentary on consumerist society and corrupt political systems. Gordimer’s work often examines complex political and social issues through the portrait of daily experience. She details an individual’s journey in such a way that renders her work important regardless of time or setting. In her conclusion to *The Paris Review* interview, Gordimer states: “I would like to say something about how I feel in general about what a novel, or any story, ought to be. It’s a quotation from Kafka. He said, ‘A book ought to be an ax to break up the frozen sea within us.’”

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Gordimer, N. (2010) *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1954-2008,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gordimer, N. (1988) *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*, New York: Knopf Inc.

“Nadine Gordimer.” (2011) *British Council Literature*. <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/nadine-gordimer>.

Roberts, R.S. (2005) *No Cold Kitchen: A Biography of Nadine Gordimer*. STE Publishers.

LIST OF SELECTED WORKS

**Novels**\**No Time Like the Present* (2012)  
\**Get a Life* (2005)  
\**The Pickup* (2001)  
\**The House Gun* (1998)  
*\*My Son’s Story* (1990)  
*\*A Sport of Nature* (1987)  
*\*July’s People* (1981) *\*Burger’s Daughter* (1980) *\*The Conservationist* (1975)  
*\*Occasion for Loving* (1963)  
\**A World of Strangers* (1958)

**Short Story Collections**\**Loot and Other Stories* (2003)  
\**Jump and Other Stories* (1991) *\*A Soldier’s Embrace* (1980)  
*\*Not for Publication* (1965)  
\**The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952)

**Drama**  
*Choosing Justice: Allan Boesak* (1984 documentary in collaboration with her son) *Frontiers* (1989 BBC film; screenplay) *The Gordimer Stories 1981-82* (television; contributing screenwriter)

**Nonfiction**  
\**Writing and Being* (1995)  
\**Lifetimes Under Apartheid* (with David Goldblatt) (1986)  
\**On the Mines* (with David Goldblatt) (1973)