

Nadine Gordimer dies

South African Nobel Prize-winning writer and anti-apartheid activist Nadine Gordimer, who became an icon through her unique insights into the country's social agonies, has died at the age of 90.



Nadine Gordimer, who only recently came to say we have to [fight the secrecy bill](#), has died. (Image: [Volger](#), via Wikimedia Commons)

Through 15 novels, several volumes of short stories, non-fiction and other works published in 40 languages around the world, Gordimer eviscerated white-minority rule under the apartheid system and its aftershocks once democracy had been achieved in 1994.

The writer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, died peacefully in her sleep at her home in Johannesburg on Sunday, her family said.

Gordimer's reputation rests on a series of novels including "A Guest of Honour", "The Conservationist", "Burger's Daughter", "July's People" and "A Sport of Nature", which the Nobel committee called "magnificent epic writing".

News of her death prompted an outpouring of tributes, notably from the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which handles the legacy of South Africa's peace icon and first democratic president.

The foundation described Gordimer as "a great writer, patriot and voice for equality and democracy".

Mandela had a long friendship with Gordimer, beginning in his years as a young activist and continuing after his release from prison in 1990, the foundation said.

Madiba's view

In his autobiography, Mandela wrote of his time in prison: "I read all the unbanned novels of Nadine Gordimer and learned a great deal about the white liberal sensibility."

The ruling African National Congress noted that Gordimer had been a party member while it was a banned organisation, and said the country "has lost an unmatched literary giant whose life's work was our mirror and an unending quest for humanity".

For Gordimer, her profession was an affliction.

"Writing is indeed, some kind of affliction in its demands as the most solitary and introspective of occupations," she once said.

The anti-apartheid activist also said it was not truth itself which was beauty, but the hunger for it.

She found this hunger at a young age when, growing up in a well-off, racially-segregated neighbourhood, she spent her childhood secluded in libraries.

"Only many years later was I to realise that if I had been a child in the black category I might not have become a writer at all, since the library that made this possible for me was not open to any black child," she said in her Nobel acceptance speech.

Born on 20 November 1923, Gordimer grew up in an affluent suburb of the gold-mining town of Springs, east of Johannesburg.

Her mother believed she had a weak heart and often kept her home from school. With time on her hands, she started writing at the age of nine.

She published her first story, "Come Again Tomorrow" in the children's section of a Johannesburg magazine when she was 14.

Gordimer came face-to-face with the liberation struggle when her best friend, Bettie du Toit, was arrested for anti-apartheid activities in 1960.

She went on to chronicle apartheid society, the liberation struggle, its forbidden friendships and its underground networks.

A 'tiny part'

"To have lived to see the end coming, and to have had some tiny part in it has been extraordinary and wonderful," Gordimer said after the end of apartheid in 1994.

In her final years she kept out of the public spotlight, preferring to commit her complex views on the country's young democracy to paper than talk about them.

In one interview, she said that in the new South Africa: "There are things that are remarkably good and things that are very, very worrying."

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies paid tribute to the daughter of Jewish immigrants, describing her as "a brave, principled woman who used her remarkable literary gifts to speak out on behalf of the oppressed".

In her novels she "laid bare the evils of racism and racial discrimination, showing with unmatched sensitivity and insight not

only the harm it inflicted on the oppressed, but also how it brutalised and thus demeaned the oppressors," it said.

Gordimer's children from two marriages, her son Hugo and daughter Oriane, were at her bedside when she died, the family said.

A private memorial service will be announced later.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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