



**The Best of the Booker**

## Readers' Guides

# The Conservationist by Nadine Gordimer

**Publisher Bloomsbury**  
**Paperback RRP £7.99**

### Winning year 1974

#### Other shortlisted titles in 1974

Stanley Middleton – *Holiday* (joint winner)  
Kingsley Amis – *Ending Up*  
Beryl Bainbridge – *The Bottle Factory Outing*  
CP Snow – *In Their Wisdom*

#### 1974 Judges

Ion Trewin (Chair), AS Byatt, Elizabeth Jane Howard



## About the author

Nadine Gordimer was born in Springs, in South Africa in 1923. She was educated at a convent school and spent a year at Witwaterstrand University. Since then, her life has been devoted to her writing. Her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), was based largely on her own life and set in her home town. In 1974, her novel *The Conservationist* was joint winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction. Nadine Gordimer has been awarded fifteen honorary degrees from universities in USA, Belgium, South Africa, and from York, Oxford and Cambridge Universities. She was made a Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and was judge of the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. She was also a founder of the Congress of South African Writers. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and in 2007, the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

## The Conservationist

Mehring is rich. He has all the privileges and possessions that South Africa has to offer, but his possessions refuse to remain objects. His wife, son, and mistress leave him; his foreman and workers become increasingly indifferent to his stewardship; even the land rises up, as drought, then flood, destroy his farm.

## Discussion points

- Mehring has a complex and contradictory relationship with his son, Terry. How does this manifest itself in the novel and why does Mehring feel so much guilt?
- 'Rebirth and mortality' is one of the key themes of *The Conservationist*, how is this symbolised throughout the novel?
- Jacobus is Mehring's right hand man and proves himself to be a capable farmer. Is Jacobus loyal to Mehring and is the relationship more like employer and employee or master and slave?
- Has *The Conservationist*, because it is so closely linked with apartheid, lost its political urgency?
- Does the burial of the dead man found on the farm bring about closure for Mehring?

## Other books by Nadine Gordimer

*The Lying Days*; *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories*; *Six Feet of the Country*; *Short Stories*; *A World of Strangers*; *Friday's Footprint*; *Occasion for Loving*; *Not for Publication*, *The Late Bourgeois World*; *A Guest of Honour*; *Livingstone's Companions: Stories*; *Selected Stories*; *Some Monday for Sure*; *Burger's Daughter*; *A Soldier's Embrace*; *July's People*; *Something Out There*; *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*; *Lifetimes: Under Apartheid*; *Reflections of South Africa: Short Stories*; *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*; *My Son's Story*; *Crimes of Conscience: Selected Short Stories*; *Jump and Other Stories*; *Why Haven't You Written?*; *None to Accompany Me*; *Writing and Being Harold*; *Claudia and Their Son Duncan*; *The House Gun*; *Living in Hope and History*; *Notes From Our Century*; *The Pickup*; *Loot and Other Stories*; *Get A Life*; *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black*

## Further Reading

*In the Heart of the Country* – JM Coetzee  
*In a Free State* – VS Naipaul

## Useful links

[www.bloomsbury.com/nadinegordimer](http://www.bloomsbury.com/nadinegordimer)  
<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth03D251553012635618>  
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/archive/8>