



# Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing was born on 22 October 1919 to British parents in Kermanshah in what was then known as Persia (now Iran) as Doris May Taylor. Her father, Alfred Cook Taylor, formerly a captain in the British army during the First World War, was a bank official. Her mother, Emily Maude Taylor, had been a nurse. In 1925 the family moved to a farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) hoping to improve their income. Lessing described her childhood on the farm in the first part of her autobiography, *Under My Skin* (1994). At the age of seven, she was sent to a convent boarding school but later moved to a girls' school in Salisbury. When 14, she independently ended her formal schooling. In the following years she worked as a young nanny, telephonist, office worker, stenographer and journalist and had several short stories published. In 1939 she married Frank Charles Wisdom with whom she had a son, John, and a daughter, Jean. The couple divorced in 1943. In 1945, Doris married Gottfried Lessing, a German-Jewish immigrant she had met in a Marxist group mainly concerned with the race issue. She became involved with the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party. She and Gottfried had a son, Peter. When the couple divorced in 1949, she took Peter and moved to London, quickly establishing herself as a writer. Between 1952 and 1956, she was a member of the British Communist Party and was active in the campaign against nuclear weapons. Because of her criticism of the South African regime, she was prohibited entry to that country between 1956 and 1995. She now lives in London.

Doris Lessing made her debut as a novelist with *The Grass is Singing* (1950), which examines the relationship between a white farmer's wife and her black servant. The book is both a tragedy based in love-hatred and a study of unbridgeable racial conflicts.

During the 1950s, Doris Lessing worked on what were to become five novels in the *Children of Violence* series, and in 1962 she gained international notice for her novel *The Golden Notebook*. Her novels touch on issues of race and politics, and also on her search for meaning as a writer and a woman; she is often considered a heroic figure by feminists. Doris Lessing continued to write novels, graphic novels, and essays throughout the 20th century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>. She also published the memoirs *Under My Skin* (1995) and *Walking in the Shade* (2000). Doris Lessing is the oldest person ever to win a Nobel Prize for literature; she turned 88 in 2007, the year she was given the prize.