
French author Patrick Modiano wins Nobel Literature prize

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The Nobel Academy described the novelist, whose work has often focused on the Nazi occupation of France, as "a Marcel Proust of our time".

The award - presented to a living writer - is worth eight million kronor (£691,000).

Previous winners include literary giants such as Rudyard Kipling, Toni Morrison and Ernest Hemingway.

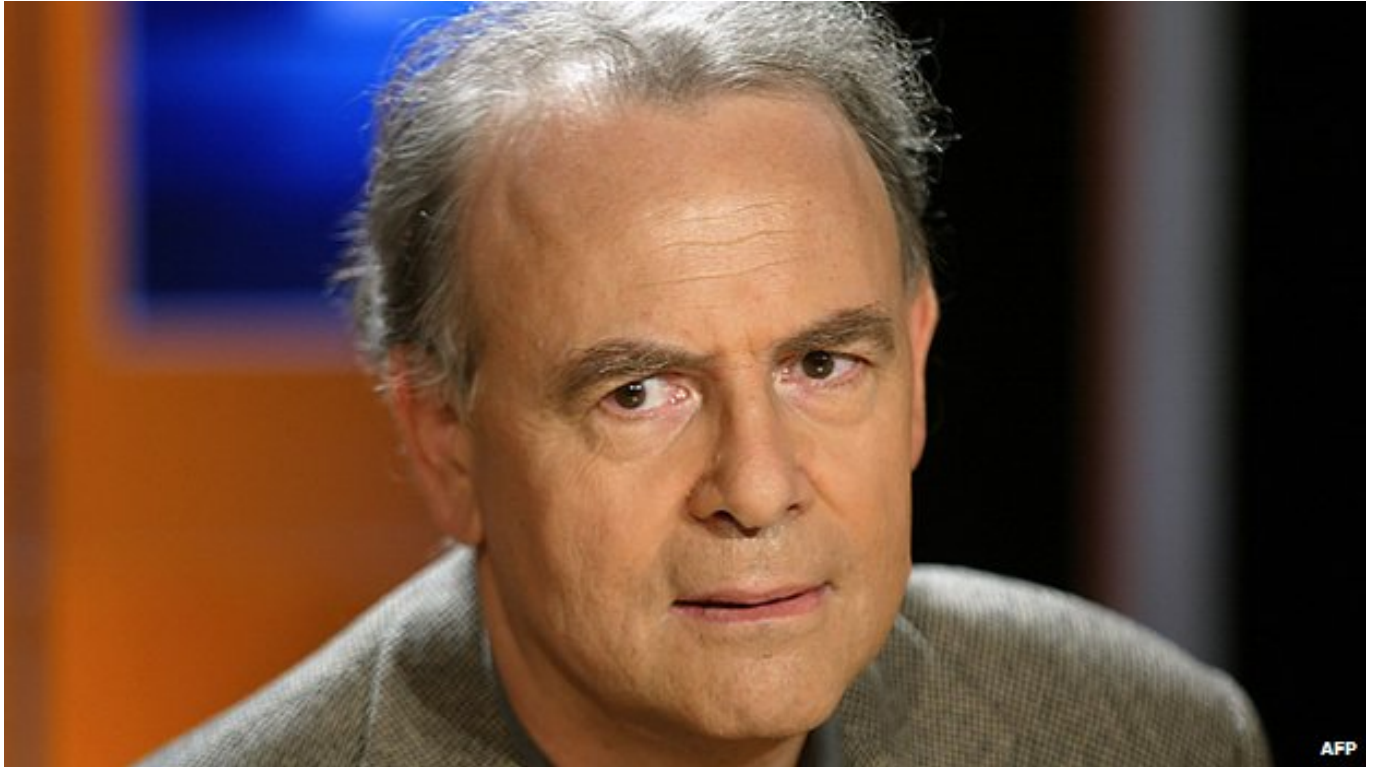
At a press conference in Paris, the publicity-shy Modiano expressed his surprise at the win and said he was keen to find out why he was chosen.

"I wasn't expecting it at all," he said. "It was like I was a bit detached from it all, as if a doppelganger with my name had won."

Modiano beat bookies' favourites Japanese writer Haruki Murakami and Kenyan novelist, poet and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The last French writer to win the prize was Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio in 2008.

The academy said the award was "for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the occupation".

"This is someone who has written many books that echo off each other... that are about memory, identity and aspiration," Peter Englund, the academy's permanent secretary said.

ANALYSIS

Patrick Modiano published his first novel, *La Place de l'Etoile*, in 1968

By Henri Astier, BBC News

Patrick Modiano has been a national literary treasure in France for decades. But up until now, he has also been one of the country's best-kept secrets. Only a handful of his 25-odd novels have been translated into English.

One reason for this might be that Modiano's storylines are as slim as the books themselves. They usually centre on young men cast adrift among high-living crooks in 1960s Paris. There is a sense of threat, but little is explained.

The plot, however, matters much less than the feelings evoked by his deceptively simple prose. Blurred memory plays a key role. Modiano's narrators try to make sense of half-remembered events from their youth, looking back through a glass darkly.

The lack of clarity goes hand in hand with geographical precision - with each Paris location overlaid with layers of imperfect memories. The poetic character of Modiano's writing may explain why few have ventured to translate him so far. Hopefully the Nobel Prize will now give him the international recognition he deserves.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, quoted by Reuters news agency, said Modiano was "undoubtedly one of the greatest writers" of recent years.

"This is well-deserved for a writer who is moreover discreet, as is much of his excellent work."

Modiano, 69, was born in Boulogne-Billancourt, a suburb of Paris, to a businessman father and an actress mother.



Patrick Modiano has written more than 30 novels

He studied at Lycee Henri-IV in Paris, where his geometry teacher was Raymond Queneau, a writer who was to prove a major influence.

Professor Sean Hand, the head of the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Warwick said readers of Modiano "see his work as being concerned with a number of basic themes about memory, loss, identity and real ambiguities that are inherent in all of these".

Much of the author's work, he said, looked at the Vichy regime in occupied France during World War 2, particularly the part it played in the deportation of Jews to concentration camps.

Modiano's debut novel, *La Place de l'Etoile*, was published in 1968 but, more than 40 years later, has yet to be translated into English.

Professor Hand said: "I don't think it was until 2010 that the book was translated into German.

"The controversy is that he returned to this period and you could say he's exposing France's guilt about the Vichy act of participation in the round up and deportation and extermination of Jews but in doing so, he's also returning to it, not really to offer a historical critique but more to enter back into this almost dream-like period of moral suspension."

Many of Modiano's other works have been translated into English, among them *Les boulevards de ceinture* (1972; *Ring Roads : A Novel*, 1974), *Villa Triste* (1975; *Villa Triste*, 1977), *Quartier perdu* (1984; *A Trace of Malice*, 1988) and *Voyage de nocces* (1990; *Honeymoon*, 1992).

His most recent novel is *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* (2014).

Modiano also worked with film director Louis Malle on the screenplay of *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), a feature film about a teenage boy during the German occupation of France.

His sixth novel, *Missing Person* (French title: *Rue des boutiques obscures*), won the French literary accolade the Prix Goncourt in 1978.

Other prizes include Grand prix du roman de l'Academie francaise in 1972 and the 2010 prix mondial Cino Del Duca by the Institut de France for lifetime achievement.

In 2012, he won the Austrian State Prize for European Literature.

A total 111 individuals have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature between 1901 and 2014.

Last year's winner was Canadian author Alice Munro.
