



## African Love Stories: An Anthology

*Ama Ata Aidoo (Editor/Introduction)*

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## **African Love Stories: An Anthology** Ama Ata Aidoo (Editor/Introduction)

African love stories? Is that not some kind of anomaly? This radical collection of short stories, most published in this edition for the first time, aims to debunk the myth about African women as impoverished helpless victims. With origins that span the continent, it combines budding writers with award-winning authors; the result is a melting pot of narratives from intriguing and informed perspectives.

These twenty odd tales deal with challenging themes and represent some of the most complex of love stories. Many are at once heart breaking yet heart warming and even courageous. In Badoe's hilarious 'The Rival', we encounter a 14 -year-old girl who is determined to capture her uncle's heart. His wife, she decided would just have to go. Mr. Mensah the uncle is all of sixty years old.

Crafted by a stellar cast of authors that includes El Saadawi, Ogundipe, Magona, Tadjo, Krog, Aboulela, Adichie, Oyeyemi, wa Goro, Atta, Manyika and Baingana, there is hardly any aspect of women's love life untouched. From labour pains to burials, teenagers to octogenarians, and not to mention race-fraught and same-sex relationships, the human heart is all out there: beleaguered and bleeding, or bold, and occasionally triumphant.

It is highly recommended that you the reader take the stories one at a time, so that you meet the women protagonists individually. So that you can listen to them and hear their hearts properly" whether Sudanese, Kenyan, Ghanaian, Nigerian or Zimbabwean. As for the tales as a whole, you might find them eye-opening, perhaps even inspirational, but above all, you will be entertained by them.

## **African Love Stories: An Anthology Details**

Date : Published December 19th 2006 by Ayebia Clarke Publishing (first published January 1st 2006)

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Author : Ama Ata Aidoo (Editor/Introduction)

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# From Reader Review African Love Stories: An Anthology for online ebook

## **Wario Helena says**

Very diverse writers, with very diverse writing styles but one common thing, amazing story telling skills

The diversity in writing may not allow you to read all stories in one go. It may be too much to take in in one go.

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## **George Rife says**

A couple of the stories are at 5- star level and about 5 more are 4 star, the majority 3 star-ers. My favorites were "Modi's Bride" by Sindiwe Mgaona and "The Lawless" by Sefi Atta. I enjoyed the different settings, they often seemed exotic compared to most stories by western writers, and I liked the unusual expressions and phrases.

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## **Samir Rawas Sarayji says**

A good anthology with some excellent stories, and a few mediocre ones in terms of quality. Highly recommended for readers interested in contemporary African writers, just don't expect remarkable writing throughout. Many stories follow the stylistics of MFA programs, which is not bad in itself, only it drains away the daring and/or experimental aspect of writing that can push a writer's boundaries. So I'd say, this is 'safe' writing in a mostly enjoyable compilation.

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## **Gabriela says**

I had great expectations and the book was average. Interesting. One very good story and others much less accomplished.

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## **Debbie says**

By various authors and, as with any such collection, the mood and subject manner, as well as the style of writing varies greatly from tale to tale. And so did my reactions. Some stories were compelling, but some I could have willingly skipped. But all gave me a glimpse into modern African womanhood, an area with which I'm not very familiar.

Don't let the title fool you – there's not a traditional "love story" in the bunch. 4 stars

Thank you to Amy McKie at Amy Reads for this win.

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## Ayebia says

African Love Stories: An Anthology ed. Ama Ata Aidoo

Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd, Banbury, 2006, pb 272pp

Reviewed by: Karen McCarthy in *Wasafiri*: 14 August 2007

I couldn't help noticing that the twenty-one stories included in this anthology are all written by women, yet there is nothing in the title to suggest that this is the case. Is the word love on its own enough for us to assume that its authors will be female? Should we conclude that men do not write love stories and certainly not African men? If they did, how would the collected works be termed? 'Love Stories', with its Mills and Boon connotations, is an unlikely moniker I suspect.

Inevitably, these kinds of concerns crop up when we analyze anthologies and writers of African origin across the Diaspora are continually called upon to negotiate tiresome issues around categorization. What it comes down to though, ultimately, is where the book might end up in the bookshop and there I'd say the less narrow the category the better. I was therefore only a little disappointed, having allowed myself momentarily to get my hopes up, to discover that there were no new metrosexuals, with stories from a distinctive male perspective, lurking within the covers.

Equally challenging and far more important is deciding on and compiling within the unifying premise, which in this case is stories about love by African women writers. In this regard, Ama Ata Aidoo – herself a distinguished editor and novelist – answers any queries we might have in two ways. First, she has assembled a distinguished cast that includes many prize-winners and notables including Nawal El Saadawi, Véronique Tadjo, Helen Oyeyemi, Wangui wa Goro and Sindiwe Magona to name a few.

Then she has selected an array of stories, which as she explains in her introduction are as:

Diverse, yet strangely linked as the continent they represent. Examined closely the dissimilarities are neither geographic nor ethnic, even when certain authors thought that they were exhibiting specific ethnic and cultural tendencies. This is not only because emotional naivety or pain and bewilderment are universal, but also because the collection exposes a general African landscape that is uniformly bewildering in every vital aspect: social, political and economic.

The latter sentiment is echoed in Leila Aboulela's stunning opener, 'Something Old, Something New' – the story of a Sudanese-Scottish mixed marriage that encapsulates all of the above and more. It begins:

Her country disturbed him. It reminded him of the first time he had held a human bone; the touching simplicity of it, the strength. Such was the landscape of Khartoum: bone coloured sky, a purity in the desert air, barenness.

Delicate, precise and achingly lyrical in its telling, 'Something Old, Something New' is a finely balanced piece, that explicates the personal and the political predicaments of its protagonists without judgement. Through the relationship, the author explores the dichotomies between East and West, Islam and Christianity (the groom is already a converted Muslim when he meets his fiancée in an English Edinburgh mosque) and poverty and wealth. None of the situations or characters conform to stereotypes; and while the boyfriend's

experience of his new adopted culture is often awkward, Aboulela writes with an assured grace that allows every complexity to stand alone:

He had thought, from the books he'd read and the particular British Islam he had been exposed to, that in a Muslim country he would find elegance and reason. Instead he found melancholy, a sensuous place, life stripped to the bare bones.

'Life stripped to the bare bones' is a phrase that applies to Sefi Atta's "The Lawless". Set in Nigeria in 1994, at the time of the Abacha regime, when 'lawlessness' tugged at every thread of society, it is the story of Ogun and his rag-tag band of fellow drama students; Crazehead, Professor, Fineboy and Shango, who all reside in Ogun's family home. When the government closes down their university for some misdemeanour or other, the gang put on plays – often religious allegories and fable tales, hence 'Shango' – in the empty swimming pool and seek, unsuccessfully, funding from the Americans and the British Council.

Their world is precarious; their lives disrupted by social and political events more than any British student or citizen could ever comprehend. As Ogun puts it:

Armed robbers took over Lagos streets at night. They attacked homes with machetes and guns. People swore some of them were university students – they spoke so well. The raids were a social revolution, I'd bragged at the time, not knowing I would be personally affected.

Ironically, we learn that this is the source of Ogun's own tragedy: he comes from college one day to find his whole family has been wiped out by armed robbers.

Humour, whether ironic or shambolic, is one of this story's distinguishing characteristics and Atta employs it to suit each situation with skill: 'How can we ever have decent sex with rollers?' I'd asked my last girlfriend. 'I mean, can't I ruffle up your hair once in a while?' She said, as an African woman. She didn't appreciate her hair being ruffled up. I complained and complained until she agreed. 'Okay I'll take them out, but after sex I'm rolling my hair up again.'

When out-of-work soap star Toyosi arrives on the scene with her baby daughter, the action steps up. The water is cut off, the baby gets ill and at Toyosi's bidding, the gang becomes more 'lawless' than they ever imagined. Yet beneath the laughs—and there are many—there is sensitivity and pathos: "Toyosi smoothed the mattress with such diligence I knew she was scared. The child kicked weakly. I'd never seen a baby with cheekbones before."

Of the twenty-two writers here, eight hail from Nigeria, including the Commonwealth Writers' Prize winner Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose 'Transition to Glory' is a witty and poignant tale of a Lagos radio presenter who breaks down after the death of her lover. Affairs inevitably feature throughout the collection, whether thwarted or otherwise, from Yaba Badoe's hilarious yet magical 'The Rival' to Blessing Musariri's 'Counting Down the Hours'. This is an effecting account of a 17-year-old Zimbabwean girl who, left at home alone by her parents who 'share children and property – where neither of them resides – and little else', embarks on an affair with a family friend. But there is a price to pay: a separation from self that Musariri expresses through metaphor, which the protagonist describes as being like 'separating the yolk of an egg from the white'. Eventually we get the omelette, but not until a few eggs are broken.

These themes of isolation and at times degradation, from self and community, are most powerfully manifested in Doreen Baingana's brilliant and quietly heartbreaking 'Tropical Fish' – the story of a Ugandan student's relationship with an English businessman. While Christine is aware of Peter's mercenary nature –

‘He paid next to nothing to the local fishermen, then sent the fish by tank to Britain for pet shops – very good profits’ – she is also complimented by his attention and allows herself to hope for more. But despite the ‘bubble baths, gin and tonics’ and ‘clean, airy white house’ that she gets to visit, there is never any relationship that goes beyond ‘ganga sex’. Baingana won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the collection of which this is the title story and it is small surprise. This deeply moving account describes not only the deterioration of a relationship and a young girl’s self esteem, but simultaneously addresses the colonial paradigm in all its complexity.

Given the enormity of the task in hand, Ama Ata Aidoo has done a sterling job. The collection has depth and diversity and while faithful to the theme, the stories are distinct and vibrant in tone, texture and content. Nawal El Saadawi’s 1978 classic ‘The Veil’ is as timeless as Magona’s folkloric ‘Modi’s Bride’ as mystical and poetic as Oyeyemi’s magic realist ‘The Tell Tale Heart’; while Promise Oguachukwu’s ‘Needles of the Heart’ – a depressingly familiar account of a woman who endures a lifetime of domestic violence – confirms that life can begin at 80! Most experimental in terms of structure is Antjie Krog’s ‘Three Love Stories in Brackets’, whose explanatory note reminds us that:

The brackets are to say; women’s lives usually take place in brackets, in silence, in places we don’t know. They don’t tell you about it, someone else tells you about it. So now you have the stories about women told by others, but the brackets remind you that the voice you hear is not that of the women, it is the voice of others.

African Love Stories: An Anthology

Edited by Ama Ata Aidoo

Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited (2006)

272pp. Paperback

Review by Evelyn C. White in Horizons Fall 2009 under Arts & Culture

A quarter of a century after Alice Walker was lambasted for depicting a black lesbian relationship in *The Color Purple*, Ugandan writer Monica Arac de Nyeko won the 2007 Caine Prize for her story “Jambula Tree.” Written with deep poignancy, the author details the desire that forever marks the friendship between two schoolgirls.

“I just wanted to write about pure love...in a complex society,” said de Nyeko, 30, about her landmark achievement.

The saga is among many well-crafted tales in African Love Stories, edited by pioneering Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo, “Love is at the bottom of nearly all earthly happenings,” she asserts in the Introduction. For a continent long burdened with damning images of violence, the volume is a vital counter-narrative that presents Africa as a landscape of tenderness, however unruly or complex.

Indeed, the book is a refreshingly devoid of couplings with blissful Hollywood endings. Consider “Deep Sea Fishing” by Kenyan writer Wangui wa Goro. The evocative story chronicles a pair on the brink of their first sexual encounter. As their passion rises, the woman reveals her pained history as a survivor of female circumcision. The author writes: “He had known that there was something significant troubling her, but not for one moment had he imagined that it would be this... He was proud that he had not acted adversely, that the need in his loins was not the only propulsion in his desire for her.”

“Marriage and Other Impediments” maps the emotional turmoil of a Nigerian woman soon to present her German fiancé to her family. “My mom jumped up... and started screaming in Yoruba,” writes Tomi

Adeaga. “You want to kill me! Where is all this nonsense coming from?” … ‘How will I show my face in public,’ she screamed.”

Zimbabwean author Blessing Musariri explores an adulterous affair between a sassy teenager and a “constipated hippo” of a man in “Counting Down the Hours.” “The ‘s’ in seventeen doesn’t stand for stupid,” the protagonist declares. This winning collection celebrates the myriad faces of love in Africa.

Salt Spring Island, B.C., writer Evelyn C. White is the author of

*Alice Walker: A Life.*

Review of African Love Stories edited by Ama Ata Aidoo

Love Stories from Africa

FEATURE: INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING

The Bookseller 21 September 2007

After Heinemann stopped publishing new titles in its African Writers Series, commissioning editor Becky Ayebia Clarke took the chance to go it alone.

Tom Tivnan reports on her award-winning success

“In the news about Africa, all you really hear about is the wars, the famines, the child soldiers. I’m not saying this doesn’t exist, but despite all the trouble, people still lead happy, full lives. And they do normal things like fall in love” Becky Ayebia Clarke, Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd.

In July, Banbury-based Ayebia Clarke Publishing made the pages of the Daily Graphic, Ghana’s biggest-selling newspaper, with the arresting headline: “Ghanaian Publisher Publishes Book on Lesbianism that Wins Major Award”. The paper related how the Caine Prize for African Writing, often called the “African Booker”, had been won by Monica Arac de Nyeko for “Jambula Tree”, a short story about a relationship between two girls that appeared in Ayebia’s African Love Stories: An Anthology edited by Ama Ata Aidoo (a prominent Ghanaian writer, critic and academic).

Becky Ayebia Clarke, a Ghanaian ex-pat and the publisher of Ayebia, shakes her head ruefully at the angle of the story. She says: “Same-sex relationships are still taboo in Africa. But perhaps we are moving to where we can have a grown-up debate about it when a story like ‘Jambula Tree’ wins a major award”.

Whatever the controversy in Ghana, the Caine Prize provided the independent publisher with some welcome publicity. The book, first published in 2006, went into its second reprint, and the publisher says sales worldwide of African Love Stories are nearing the 12,000 mark.

Space to fill

A former commissioning editor for Heinemann’s African Writers Series, Clarke founded her own company in 2003 with her husband David, and the first titles appeared in 2004. Ayebia has thus far released 10 books, consisting of African and Caribbean fiction and essays, and biographies of notable Africans. A further 10 titles are in the pipeline, including a series of critical essays on African writers and planned biographies of African footballers playing in the European Leagues including the Chelsea and Ghanaian footballer Michael Essien.

Clarke joined Heinemann—whose seminal African Writers list introduced such authors as Chinua Achebe to

the UK—in 1991 as an editorial assistant, quickly rising to be series commissioning editor. She was made redundant in 2002, when Heinemann, in the series' 40th anniversary year, decided not to commission any more new titles. "My world fell apart", she says. "I came home and stayed in bed for three days".

She recovered when an agent friend, unaware that Heinemann had decided to drop new work from the list, offered Clarke *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, a novel by Njabulo S. Ndebele, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. "I thought: 'I want to publish this book,'" she says. "I didn't know if I had the means, but I was sure I was going to do it. I felt a surge of strength and confidence."

She and David, a retired university lecturer, got together about £35,000 from savings, her own redundancy package and Arts Council of England South East funding to start the company. The two remain its only employees (although they work with a list of freelance editors, typesetters, illustrators, web management team and a designer). "David does the figures and I do the creative side", Clarke says.

The Caine Prize win came amid increased recognition of African writers in the UK. In April, the Orange Broadband Prize was awarded to Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie for her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In the same month, Achebe won the Man Booker International Prize for his great work *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958.

While careful not to overly criticise Heinemann—"I had 12 very, very happy years there"—Clarke feels vindicated by recent awards: "It seems odd to continue with a backlist when you are not commissioning new work. You need to be able to find new voices. But, it is good for me, because I am trying to position myself in the space vacated by Heinemann".

#### Another Africa

Before the Caine Prize, Ayebia's biggest boost was from the astute acquisition of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* from the Women's Press. An African classic, it has sold over 22,000 copies in the UK and South Africa for Ayebia.

Given the make-up of Ayebia's list, African and Caribbean studies courses are the company's bread and butter. Ayebia is actively courting the US market too, recently signing a distribution deal with Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. Africa is also a potentially huge market, albeit a problematic one, says Clarke. "Most of our sales to Africa are to ministries of education. The retail infrastructure isn't there and sadly, there is not the great reading culture that there is in the West".

In the UK, white middle-class women are Ayebia's target audience. Part of the reason for publishing *African Love Stories* was to appeal to this demographic. Clarke says: "In the news about Africa, all you really hear about is the wars, the famines, the child soldiers. I'm not saying that this doesn't exist, but despite all the trouble, people still lead happy, full lives. And they do normal things like fall in love."

Ultimately, what drives Clarke is finding new talent. She's work the British Council's *Crossing Borders* Online Magazine as an Editor, a collaboration between the British Council, Lancaster University and African partners, which mentors new African writers. The programme, although now closed has paid dividends, with Caine winner de Nyeko one of its graduates.

"When you open a manuscript that comes from Africa, often you can literally smell the wood smoke", Clarke says. "These people are so committed that they have been writing in a home without electricity, by the light of kerosene lamps. It does break my heart if I have to turn them away, but that kind of passion is inspiring".

African Love Stories: An Anthology  
edited by Ama Ata Aidoo

Review by Percy Zvomuya in The South African Mail & Guardian – December 2006

Ama Ata Aidoo clearly sets out in the introduction the difficulty of an anthology of love stories. "One clear problem ... is that the moment you describe anything as such, readers and audiences begin to look for the frivolous and the sentimental."

So begins this collection of short stories edited by Aidoo and written by female writers who live or have lived on, or have a links to the continent. As one reads on, one encounters the varied experiences of love conveyed by recognisable names such as Wangui wa Goro (who translated Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*), Purple Hibiscus's Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Antjie Krog, Molara Ogundipe and Helen Oyeyemi et al.

These tales are varied, necessarily so, and what comes out is the richness and diversity of African love experiences – if ever such a concept could be pigeon-holed in a specific locale. The stories range from the mountainous landscapes and old country near the southern tip of the African continent of Sindiwe Magona's 'Modi's Bride,' right up to Germany, in the heart of Europe. Where they are set in Europe, such as 'Marriage and Other Impediments' by Tomi Adeaga, what emerges is the reality of exile, how the protagonists deal with race and the negotiation and forging of new identities.

One such is 'Something Old, Something New' by Leila Aboulela, a moving tale of a Sudanese Muslim girl who is getting married to a Scottish convert to Islam. It tells how he negotiates his rites of passage through sheer patience and US dollar bills paid to a crooked brother-in-law to smooth the rugged road.

But it is 'Transition to Glory' by Adichie that stands out. This is as much a story of female rivalry as it is a paean to enduring love. Emotionally controlled, it is written in spare prose and easily achieves what it sets out to do: celebrate love.

In sum, this is an often-beautiful anthology of what one may describe as a comprehensive collection of the nebulous concepts that make up love. It tackles, with some success, varied themes like unrequited love, familial love, same-sex love, love across the colour line, religion, age and sexual love...

Love Stories from Africa  
edited by Ama Ata Aidoo  
African women are thriving as writers of romance  
Penny Dale spoke with some of them  
"We too love, we fall in love and love quite deeply, just like people in the West do, but do we ever really hear about that?" asks Ghanaian publisher Becky Ayebia Clarke.

Very rarely, she contends. And that's why she has gathered a collection of short stories on love, from established and emerging writers from all over Africa.

Clarke has dreamt of this love anthology, African Love Stories, for a long time – in fact, throughout her 12 years as

### **Muyoka says**

It's hard to give an in-depth review of this book because it is a collection of stories. Some of the works were witty, funny, and beautifully written (Modi's Bride by Sindiwe Magona was my favorite story). A few of the stories were rather lackluster and full of cliches. All in all this was a light, fun, book that was perfect for train rides/idle moments when I needed something not too engrossing to read.

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### **Oulichan Gueye says**

As many others said, 3 to 5 great stories, 8 average ones and the rest didn't make much sense to me. Maybe short stories are not for me.

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### **Pukka Tackie says**

Some of the stories were definitely better than others.

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### **Mary says**

<http://www.maryokekereviews.blogspot....>

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### **Janice says**

Very enlightening read. Aidoo does an excellent job of highlighting the condition of the African woman and the oppression she must endure as a result of her gender as much as her nationality.

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### **Kvyborny says**

some stronger than others. the first one, "Something New," is one of my very favorite short stories ever...

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### **Darkowaa says**

!!! review + Valentine's GIVEAWAY: [http://africanbookaddict.com/2016/02/...](http://africanbookaddict.com/2016/02/)

\*sigh\* I just had to give this 5 stars. I've been wanting to read this for 3 years. I finally bought this for Christmas and it was def an awesome gift to myself. This anthology of 21 contemporary African love stories is laden with breathtaking originality. I loved most of the stories and learned a great deal...

Look out for a giveaway of this book- i have an extra brand new copy that I want to give away next month!  
More on the book blog soon.

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### **Debbie says**

By various authors and, as with any such collection, the mood and subject manner, as well as the style of writing varies greatly from tale to tale. And so did my reactions. Some stories were compelling, but some I could have willingly skipped. But all gave me a glimpse into modern African womanhood, an area with which I'm not very familiar.

Don't let the title fool you – there's not a traditional “love story” in the bunch. 4 stars

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