

# **TWENTY OUTSTANDING AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS**



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## **Ama Ata Aidoo**

Professor **Ama Ata Aidoo**, *née* **Christina Ama Aidoo** (born 23 March 1940, Saltpond) is a Ghanaian author, poet, playwright and academic, who is also a former Minister of Education in the Ghana government.

### **Life**

Born in Saltpond in Ghana's Central Region, she grew up in a Fante royal household, the daughter of Nana Yaw Fama, chief of Abeamzi Kyiakor, and Maame Abasema. Aidoo was sent by her father to Wesley Girls' High School in Cape Coast from 1961 to 1964. The headmistress of Wesley Girls' bought her her first typewriter. After leaving high school, she enrolled at the University of Ghana in Legon and received her Bachelor of Arts in English as well as writing her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, in 1964. The play was published by Longman the following year, making Aidoo the first published African woman dramatist.

She worked in the United States of America where she held a fellowship in creative writing at Stanford University. She also served as a research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, and as a Lecturer in English at the University of Cape Coast, eventually rising there to the position of Professor.

Aside from her literary career, Aidoo was appointed Minister of Education under the Provisional National Defence Council in 1982. She resigned after 18 months. She has also spent a great deal of time teaching and living abroad for months at a time. She has lived in America, Britain, Germany, and Zimbabwe. Aidoo taught various English courses at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY in the early to mid 1990s. She is currently a Visiting Professor in the Africana Studies Department at Brown University.

## **Writings**

Aidoo's works of fiction particularly deal with the tension between Western and African world views. Her first novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, was published in 1977 and

remains one of her most popular works. Many of Aidoo's protagonists are women who defy the stereotypical women's roles of their time. Her novel *Changes*, won the 1992 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book (Africa). She is also an accomplished poet - her collection *Someone Talking to Sometime* won the Nelson Mandela Prize for Poetry in 1987 - and has written several children's books.

## **Bibliography**

- *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (play), Longman, 1965
- *Anowa* (a play based on a Ghanaian legend), 1970
- *No Sweetness Here: A Collection of Short Stories*, Longman, 1970
- *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, Longman, 1977
- *Someone Talking to Sometime* (a poetry collection), 1986
- *The Eagle and the Chicken*, 1986

- *Birds and Other Poems*, College Press, Harare, 1987
- *Changes: a Love Story* (novel), 1991
- *An Angry Letter in January* (poems), 1992
- *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*, Heinemann African Writers Series, 1997
- *Diplomatic Pounds & Other Stories*, Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2012
- *African Love Stories – an anthology*, Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2012.

## **Zulu Sofola**

'**Zulu Sofola** (22 June 1935 - 5 September 1995) was the first published female Nigerian playwright and dramatist. Sofola was also a university teacher and became the first female Professor of Theater Arts in Africa.

### **Biography**

Nwazuluwa Onuekwuke Sofola was born in Bendel State to parents who were Igbo from Issele-Uku in Delta State. Spending her adolescence and early womanhood in the USA, she studied at Southern Baptist Seminary, earned a BA in English at Virginia Union University and an MA in drama (1965) from The Catholic University of America. She returned to Nigeria in 1966, and was a lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, where she obtained a PhD.

She also taught Drama at the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria where she was appointed, Head of

Department for the Performing Arts. Sofola was a singer, dancer, as well as a prolific playwright. She wrote and directed many plays for stage and television, including her own work, such as *King Emene*. Her plays "range from historical tragedy to domestic comedy and use both traditional and modern African setting". She uses "elements of magic, myth and ritual to examine conflicts between traditionalism and modernism in which male supremacy persists." She was considered one of the most distinguished women in Nigerian literature.

Sofola's most frequently performed plays are *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and *The Sweet Trap* (1977), She died in 1995 at the age of 60.

### **Selected works**

- *The Deer Hunter and The Hunter's Pearl* (1969), London: Evans Brothers
- *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (1971), Ibadan: Daystar Press
- *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), Ibadan: Evans
- *The Operators*, Ibadan: Ibadan University, 1973

- *King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion* (1974), Heinemann Educational Books. ISBN 0-435-92860-0
- *The Wizard of Law* (1975), Evans Bros. ISBN 0-237-49951-7
- *The Sweet Trap* (1977); Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-575386-X
- *Old Wines Are Tasty* (1981), Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-154-499-6
- *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986), Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- *Queen Omu-ako of Oligbo*, Buffalo: Paul Robeson Theatre, 1989
- *Eclipso and the Fantasia*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1990
- *The Showers*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1991
- *Song of a Maiden: A Play*, Illorin, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1992.
- *Lost Dreams and Other Plays*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1992.



## **Osonye Tess Onwueme**

**Osonye Tess Onwueme** (born September 8, 1955) is a Nigerian playwright, scholar and poet, who rose to prominence writing plays with themes of social justice, culture, and the environment. In 2010, she became the University Professor of Global Letters, following her exceptional service as Distinguished Professor of Cultural Diversity and English at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She has won several international awards, including: the prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award (2009), the Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for outstanding black writers (2008), the Martin Luther King, Jr./Caesar Chavez Distinguished Writers Award (1989/90), the Distinguished Authors Award (1988), and the Association of Nigerian Authors Drama Prize which she has won several times with plays like *The Desert Encroaches* (1985), *Tell It To Women* (1995), *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen* (2001), *Then She Said it* (2003), among numerous honors and international productions of her drama. Through her plays, she is able to use the theater as a medium to showcase historically silenced

views such as African Women, and shedding more light on African life. She sustains her advocacy for the global poor and youth, along with the experiences and concerns of the (African) Diaspora in her creative work. In 2007, the US State Department appointed her to the Public Diplomacy Speaker Program for North, East, and West India. The *2009 Tess International Conference: Staging Women, Youth, Globalization, and Eco-Literature*, which was exclusively devoted to the author's work was successfully held by international scholars in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, following the Fonlon-Nichols award to the dramatist. She is regarded as one of the band of more important African authors.

### **Early life and education**

She was born **Osonye Tess Akeake** in *Ogwashi-Uku*, present-day Delta state, to the family of barrister Chief Akaeke and Maria Eziashr. Osonye was educated at the *Mary Mount Secondary School*: it was while at the school that she first dabbled in writing. After secondary education, she married an agronomist, I. C. Onwueme,

and bore five children, during the time she attended the University of Ife, for her bachelor's degree in education (1979) and master's in literature (1982). She obtained her PhD at the University of Benin, studying African Drama. In 1998 she married Obika Gray, a Jamaican political scientist.

## **Works**

- *A Hen Too Soon*. 1983.
- *Broken Calabash*. 1984.
- *The Desert Encroaches* (1985)
- *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988)
- *Ban Empty Barn and other plays* (1986)
- *Legacies* (1989)
- *Three Plays: an anthology of plays by Tess Onwueme* (1993)
- *Tell It To Women: an epic drama* (1995).
- *Riot In Heaven: drama for the voices of color* (1996; 2006).
- *The Missing Face, a play* (1997; 2000).

- *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen: a play* (2000; 2006).
- *Then She Said It: a play* (2003)
- *What Mama Said, an epic drama* (2004).
- *No Vacancy* (2005)

## **Sefi Atta**

**Sefi Atta** (born 1964) is a prize-winning Nigerian author and playwright.

### **Biography**

Sefi Atta was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1964, to a family of five children. Her father Abdul-Aziz Atta was the Secretary to Federal Government and Head of the Civil Service until his death in 1972, and she was raised by her mother Iyabo Atta.

She attended Queen's College, Lagos, and Millfield School in England. In 1985, she graduated from Birmingham University and trained as a chartered accountant. She moved from England to the United States in 1994 with her husband, Gboyega Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor, and son of Olikoye Ransome-Kuti. They have one daughter.

Sefi's Lagos-based production company Atta Girl supports Care to Read, a program she initiated to earn funds for legitimate charities through staged readings.

She currently divides her time between Nigeria, England and the United States.

## **Writing**

Atta began to write while working as a CPA in New York, and in 2001, she graduated from the creative writing program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Mississippi Review* and *World Literature Today*. Her books have been translated to several languages.

## **Novels**

- 2012 *A Bit of Difference*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568920
- 2010 *Swallow*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568333

- 2005 *Everything Good Will Come*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566565707

### **Short-story collections**

- 2010 *News from Home*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568036

### **Stage plays**

- 2012 *An Ordinary Legacy*, The MUSON Festival, MUSON Centre, Lagos
- 2012 *The Naming Ceremony*, New World Nigeria, Theatre Royal Stratford East, London
- 2011 *Hagel auf Zamfara*, Theatre Krefeld, Germany
- 2011 *The Cost of Living*, Lagos Heritage Festival, Terra Kulture, Lagos
- 2005 *The Engagement*, MUSON Centre, Lagos

### **Radio plays**

- 2013 *The Wake*, Smooth FM, Lagos
- 2007 *A Free Day*, BBC Radio

- 2004 *Makinwa's Miracle*, BBC Radio
- 2002 *The Engagement*, BBC Radio

## **Screenplays**

- 2009 *Leaving on Your Mind* - quarter-finalist for the American Zoetrope Screenplay Contest

## **Selected awards and recognition**

- 2009 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa
- 2006 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa
- 2006 Caine Prize for African Literature, shortlist
- 2005 PEN International David TK Wong Prize, 1st Prize
- 2004 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2003 Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award, finalist
- 2003 Red Hen Press Short Story Award, 1st prize
- 2002 Zoetrope Short Fiction Contest, 3rd Prize
- 2002 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2002 Macmillan Writers Prize For Africa, shortlist



## **Visiting Writer**

- 2010 Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon
- 2008 Northwestern University
- 2006 University of Southern Mississippi

Atta was on the jury for the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

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## **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**



**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** (born 15 September 1977) is a Nigerian writer. She has been called "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors [that] is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature".

## **Personal life and education**

Born in the city of Enugu, she grew up the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in the university town of Nsukka in southeastern Nigeria, where the University of Nigeria is situated. While she was growing up, her father James Nwoye Adichie was a professor of statistics at the university, and her mother Grace Ifeoma was the university's first female registrar. Her family's ancestral village is in Abba in Anambra State.

Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria and moved to the United States for college. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University to live closer to her sister, who had a medical practice in Coventry. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2001.

In 2003, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received a Master of Arts degree in African studies from Yale University.

Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005–06 academic year. In 2008 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She has also been awarded a 2011–12 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Adichie, who is married, divides her time between Nigeria, where she teaches writing workshops, and the United States.

### **Writing career**

Adichie published a collection of poems in 1997 (*Decisions*) and a play (*For Love of Biafra*) in 1998. She was shortlisted in 2002 for the Caine Prize for her short story "You in America".

In 2003, her story "That Harmattan Morning" was selected as joint winner of the BBC Short Story Awards, and she won the O. Henry prize for "The American Embassy". She also won the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award) and a 2007 Beyond Margins Award for her short story "Half of a Yellow Sun".

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005).

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Biafran War. It was awarded the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction. *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been adapted into a film of the same title directed by Biyi Bandele, starring Academy Award nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and BAFTA award-winner Thandie Newton, and was released in 2014.

Her third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of short stories.

In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story, "Ceiling", was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories*.

In 2013 she published her third novel, *Americanah* which was selected by the *New York Times* as one of The 10 Best Books of 2013.

In April 2014 she was named as one of 39 writers aged under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club project celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO World Book Capital 2014

## **Lectures**

Adichie spoke on "The Danger of a Single Story" for TED in 2009. On 15 March 2012, she delivered the "Connecting Cultures" Commonwealth Lecture 2012 at the Guildhall, London. Adichie also spoke on being a

feminist for TEDxEuston in December 2012, with her speech entitled, "We should all be feminists". This speech was sampled for the 2013 song "\*\*\*Flawless" by American performer Beyoncé, where it attracted further attention.

## **Distinctions**

### **Awards and nominations**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Award</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Result</b>
	Caine Prize for African Writing	"You in America"	Nominated
2002	Commonwealth Short Story Competition	"The Tree in Grandma's Garden"	Nominated
	BBC Short Story Competition	"That Harmattan Morning"	Won
2002/2003	David T. Wong International Short Story Prize (PEN)	"Half of a Yellow Sun"	Won

	American Center Award)		
2003	O. Henry Prize	"The American Embassy"	Won
	Hurston-Wright Legacy Award: Best Debut Fiction Category		Won
	Orange Prize		Nominated
2004	Booker Prize		Nominated
	Young Adult Library Services Association Best Books for Young Adults Award	<i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	Nominated
2004/2005	John Llewellyn Rhys Prize		Nominated
2005	Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best		Won



	First Book (Africa)	
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best	Won
	First Book (overall)	
2006	National Book Critics Award	Nominated
	British Book Awards: "Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year"	Nominated
	category <i>Half of a</i>	
2007	James Tait Black Memorial Prize	Nominated
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best Book (Africa)	Nominated
	Anisfield-Wolf	
	Book Award: Fiction category	Won

	PEN Beyond Margins Award	Won
	Orange Broadband Prize: Fiction category	Won
	International Impac Dublin Award	Nominated
	Reader's Digest Author of the Year Award	Won
2008	Future Award, Nigeria: Young Person of the Year Herself category	Won
	MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant (along with 24 other winners)	Won
2009	International Nonino Prize	Won

	Frank O'Connor		
	International Short		Nominated
	Story Award		
	John Llewellyn		
	Rhys Prize	<i>The Thing</i>	Nominated
	Commonwealth	<i>Around Your</i>	
	Writers' Prize: Best	<i>Neck</i>	Nominated
2010	Book (Africa)		
	Dayton Literary		Nominated
	Peace Prize		
	ThisDay Awards:		
2011	"New Champions	Herself	Nominated
	for an Enduring		
	Culture" category		
	Chicago Tribune		
	Heartland Prize:		Won
	Fiction category		
2013	National Book	<i>Americanah</i>	
	Critics Circle		Won
	Award: Fiction		

	category	
	Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction	Nominated
2014	MTV Africa Music Awards 2014: Personality of the Year	Pending

### **Other recognitions**

- 2010 Listed among *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40"
- 2013 Listed among *New York Times'* "Ten Best Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 Listed among BBC's "Top Ten Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 *Foreign Policy* magazine "Top Global Thinkers of 2013"
- 2013 Listed among the *New African's* "100 Most Influential Africans 2013"
- 2014 Listed among Africa39 project of 39 writers aged under 40



## Flora Nwapa



**Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa** (13 January 1931 – 16 October 1993) was a Nigerian author best known as **Flora Nwapa**. Her novel *Efuru* (1966) is among the first English-language novels by a woman from Africa.

### **Biography**

Nwapa, born in Oguta, was the forerunner to a generation of African women writers. While never considering herself a feminist, she is best known for recreating life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint. In 1966 her book *Efuru* became Africa's first internationally published female novel in the English language (Heinemann Educational Books). She has been called the mother of modern African literature. Later she went on to become the first African woman publisher of novels when she founded Tata Press.

She also is known for her governmental work in reconstruction after the Biafran War. In particular she worked with orphans and refugees that were displaced during the war. Further she worked as a publisher of African literature and promoted women in African society. Flora Nwapa died on 16 October 1993 in Enugu, Nigeria.

## **Books**

## **Novels**

- *Efuru* (1966)
- *Idu* (Heinemann African Writers Series, No.56, ISBN 0-435-90056-0; 1970)
- *Never Again* (1975)
- *One is Enough* (1981)
- *Women are Different* (1986)

### **Short stories/poems**

- *This is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971)
- *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986)
- *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980)

### **Children's books**

- *Emeka, Driver's Guard* (1972)
- *Mammywater* (1979)
- *Journey to Space* (1980)
- *The Miracle Kittens* (1980)
- *The Adventures of Deke* (1980)



## **Buchi Emecheta**

**Buchi Emecheta** (born 21 July 1944, in Lagos) is a Nigerian novelist who has published over 20 books, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Her themes of child slavery, motherhood, female independence and freedom through education have won her considerable critical acclaim and honours, including an Order of the British Empire in 2005. Emecheta once described her stories as "stories of the world...[where]... women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical."

### **Early life**

**(Florence Onye) Buchi Emecheta** was born on 21 July 1944, in Lagos to Igbo parents. Both parents are from ibusa delta state Nigeria Alice (Okwuekwuhe) Emecheta and Jeremy Nwabudinke. Her father was a railway worker in the 1940s. Due to the gender bias of the time,

the young Buchi Emecheta was initially kept at home while her younger brother was sent to school; but after persuading her parents to consider the benefits of her education, she spent her early childhood at an all-girl's missionary school. Her father died when she was nine years old. A year later, Emecheta received a full scholarship to the Methodist Girls School, where she remained until the age of sixteen when she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old.

Onwordi immediately moved to London to attend university and Emecheta joined him in 1962. She gave birth to five children in six years. It was an unhappy and sometimes violent marriage (as chronicled in her autobiographical writings such as *Second-Class Citizen*). To keep her sanity, Emecheta wrote in her spare time; however, her husband was deeply suspicious of her writing, and he ultimately burned her first manuscript. At the age of 22, Emecheta left her husband. While working to support her five children alone, she earned a BSc degree in Sociology at the University of London.

She began writing about her experiences of Black British life in a regular column in the *New Statesman*, and a collection of these pieces became her first published book in 1972, *In the Ditch*. The semi-autobiographical book chronicled the struggles of a main character named Adah, who is forced to live in a housing estate while working as a librarian to support her five children. Her second novel published two years later, *Second-Class Citizen*, also drew on Emecheta's own experiences, and both books were eventually published in one volume as *Adah's Story*.

### **Early career**

From 1965 to 1969, Emecheta worked as a library officer for the British Museum in London. From 1969 to 1976 she was a youth worker and sociologist for the Inner London Education Authority, and from 1976 to 1978 she was a community worker.

Following her success as an author, Buchi Emecheta has travelled widely as a visiting professor and lecturer. From 1972 to 1979 she visited several American

universities, including Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

From 1980 to 1981, she was senior resident fellow and visiting professor of English, University of Calabar, Nigeria. In 1982 she lectured at Yale University, and the University of London, as well as holding a fellowship at the University of London in 1986.

From 1982 to 1983 Buchi Emecheta, together with her journalist son Sylvester, ran the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company.

## **Awards**

- B.Sc. (Honours), University of London, 1972.
- *New Statesman* Jock Campbell Award for *The Slave Girl*, 1979.
- British Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race, 1979.
- Arts Council of Great Britain - 1982-3.

- One of Granta's "Best of the Young British Novelists", 1983.
- PhD, University of London, 1991.
- Who's Who in Anjoma, 2011
- Who's Who in Ibusa, 2011

## **Works**

### **Novels**

- *In the Ditch* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972).
- *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Allison & Busby, 1974).
- *The Bride Price* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).
- *The Slave Girl* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977); winner of 1979 Jock Campbell Award.
- *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979; Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 65, 1980).
- *The Moonlight Bride* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

- *Our Own Freedom* (photographs by Maggie Murray; London: Sheba, 1981).
- *Destination Biafra* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982).
- *Naira Power* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Adah's Story [In the Ditch/Second-Class Citizen]* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983).
- *The Rape of Shavi* (London: Ogwugwu Afor, 1984).
- *Double Yoke* (New York: George Braziller, 1983).
- *A Kind of Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Gwendolen* (London: Collins, 1989). Published in the US as *The Family*.
- *Kehinde* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1994).
- *The New Tribe* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1999).

## **Autobiography**

- *Head Above Water* (London: Fontana, 1986).

### **Children's/Young Adults**

- *Titch the Cat* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979).
- *Nowhere to Play* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980).
- *The Wrestling Match* (Oxford University Press, 1980).

### **Plays**

- *A Kind of Marriage*, BBC television.
- *Family Bargain*, BBC television, 1987.

### **Articles**

- *The Black Scholar*, November–December 1985, p. 51.
- *Criticism and Ideology*, 1988.
- *Essence* magazine, August 1990, p. 50.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1990.
- *Publishers Weekly*, February 16, 1990, p. 73; reprinted 7 February 1994, p. 84.

- *World Literature Today*, Autumn 1994, p. 867.



## **Mabel Segun**

**Mabel Segun** (born 1930) is a Nigerian poet and writer.

Born in Ondo, Nigeria, she attended the University of Ibadan, graduating in 1953 with a BA in English, Latin and History. She taught these subjects in Nigerian schools, and later became Head of the Department of English and Social Studies and Vice-Principal at the National Technical Teachers' College, Yaba. As a broadcaster, she won the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation 1977 Artiste of the Year award.

Segun has championed children's literature in Nigeria through the Children's Literature Association of Nigeria, which she founded in 1978, and the Children's Documentation and Research Centre, which she set up in 1990 in Ibadan. She is also a fellow of the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany.

In 2010 Mabel Segun received the Nigerian National Merit Award for her lifetime achievements.

## Works

- *Conflict and Other Poems* (1986)
- *My Father's Daughter* (1965)
- *Under the Mango Tree* (1979)
- *Olu and the Broken Statue* (1985)
- *The Twins and the Tree Spirits* (1990)
- *Sorry, No Vacancy* (1985)

## **Micere Githae Mugo**

**Micere Githae Mugo** (born **Madeleine Mugo** in 1942) is a playwright, author, activist, instructor and poet from Kenya. She is a literary critic and professor of literature in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University. She was forced into exile in 1982 from Kenya during the Daniel Arap Moi dictatorship for activism and moved to teach in Zimbabwe, and later the United States. Mwalimu Mugo teaches Orature, Literature, and Creative Writing. Mugo's publications include six books, a play co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and three monographs. She has also edited journals and the Zimbabwean school curriculum. The East African Standard Century listed her among the most influential people in Kenya in 2002 – "The Top 100: They influenced Kenya Most during the 20th century".

### **Early life**

Mugo was born in 1942, in Baricho, Kirinyaga District, Kenya. The daughter of two progressive (liberal) teachers, she received a solid primary and secondary

education in Kenya, attending Alliance Girls High School. She became one of the first black students to be allowed to enroll in what had previously been a segregated academy. She later attended Makerere University (where she gained her B.A. in 1966), the University of New Brunswick (gaining her M.A. in 1973) and University of Toronto (where she gained her PhD in 1978).<sup>1</sup> She took up a teaching position at the University of Nairobi in 1973, and in 1978 or 1980 became Dean of the Faculty of Arts, making her the first female faculty dean in Kenya. She taught at the University of Nairobi until 1982, and has also taught at the University of Zimbabwe.

## **Works**

Mugo is a distinguished poet, and the author or editor of fifteen books. Her work is generally from a traditional African, Pan-African and feminist perspective, and draws heavily upon indigenous African cultural traditions. She has also collaborated with the

Zimbabwean writer Shimmer Chinodya in editing plays and stories for adolescents in Shona.

## **Plays**

- *The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti*, East African Literature Bureau, 1976
- *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, (co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), Heinemann, 1976

## **Poetry**

- *Daughter of My People, Sing!*, East African Literature Bureau, 1976
- *My Mother's Song and Other Poems*, East African Educational Publishers, 1994

## **Literary Criticism**

- *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, 1978
- *African Orature and Human Rights*, National University of Lesotho, 1991

## **Autobiography**

- *Writing & Speaking from the Heart of My Mind*, Africa World Press 2012

## **Achievements**

- The top 100:They influenced Kenya Most during the 20th century", East African Standard Century – 2002
- Distinguished Africanist Scholar Award – 2007
- Courage Award, Girl Scout Council of Central New York
- President of United Women of Africa
- CNY Women of Distinction Award – 2008,
- Lifetime Community Service Award (CNY Women Syracuse Chapter)
- Beyond Community Recognition Awards, Inc. – 2004,
- Human Rights Award, Onondaga County Human Rights Commission – 2004.
- Rockefeller Foundation Award for writing and publication – 1992

- Ford Foundation Award for research on African orature and human rights 1987–90
- Marcus Garvey Award from the Canadian Branch of UNIA (1985).

## **Janet Badjan-Young**

**Janet Badjan-Young** (born 1937) is a Gambian playwright and administrator, "easily one of the most prolific playwrights" in the country.

### **Biography**

She has a BA in Drama (UK, 1959) and a Master's degree in Communications (1979, USA). She has spent the greater part of her life outside The Gambia: in Sierra Leone, in Kenya, in Nigeria, and in the Caribbean. She worked for the United Nations Information Centre in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, before becoming Director of UNIC at Lagos, Nigeria. She is Director of the Ebunjang Theatre complex at Kanifing South.

In 2012, she was one of five Gambian women honoured for their significant contribution to "the development of The Gambia in all aspects of life", receiving the "Award of Excellence".

### **Works**



## **Plays**

- *The Ultimate Inheritance*, first staged 2001
- *The Battle of Sankandi*, first produced 2002.
- *The Dance of Katchikali: a dance drama*, first staged 2007.
- *The Hand of Fate*, published 2009.
- *Chains of Inspiration*, produced 2011.

## **Other**

- "Collective War Against Poverty", *A.M. News*, Thursday (April, 1 1): 6.

## **Véronique Tadjó**

**Véronique Tadjó** (born 1955) is a writer, poet, novelist, and artist from Côte d'Ivoire. Having lived and worked in many countries within the African continent and diaspora, she feels herself to be pan-African, in a way that is reflected in the subject matter, imagery and allusions of her work.

### **Biography**

Born in Paris, Véronique Tadjó was the daughter of an Ivorian civil servant and a French painter and sculptor. Brought up in Abidjan, she travelled widely with her family.

Tadjó completed her BA degree at the University of Abidjan and her doctorate at the Sorbonne in African-American Literature and Civilization. In 1983, she went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., on a Fulbright research scholarship.

In 1979, Tadjó chose to teach English at the Lycée Moderne de Korhogo (secondary school) in the North of Côte d'Ivoire. She subsequently became a lecturer at the English department of the University of Abidjan until 1993.

In the past few years, she has facilitated workshops in writing and illustrating children's books in Mali, Benin, Chad, Haiti, Mauritius, French Guyana, Burundi, Rwanda and South Africa.

She has lived in Paris, Lagos, Mexico City, Nairobi and London. Tadjó is currently based in Johannesburg, where since 2007 she has been head of French Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

### **Awards**

Tadjó received the Literary Prize of L'Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique in 1983 and the UNICEF Prize in 1993 for *Mamy Wata and the Monster*, which was also chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century, one of only four children's books

selected. In 2005, Tadjó won the Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire.

## **Works**

### **Poetry**

- *Latérite* (poems; Éditions Hatier "Monde noir Poche", 1984). Bi-lingual edition, *Red Earth – Latérite*; translation by Peter S. Thompson (Washington University Press, 2006)
- *A vol d'oiseau*, Éditions Harmattan; 1986); translated by Wangui wa Goro as *As The Crow Flies* (AWS Heinemann, 2001)
- *A mi-chemin* (poems; Éditions Harmattan, 2000)

### **Novels**

- *Le Royaume aveugle* (novel; Éditions Harmattan, 1991); translated by Janis Mayes as *The Blind Kingdom* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2008)

- *Champs de bataille et d'amour* (Éditions Présence Africaine; Les Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes, 1999)
- *L'ombre d'Imana: Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda*, Actes Sud, 2000); translated as *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* (Heinemann AWS, 2002)
- *Reine Pokou* (Actes Sud, 2005); translated by Amy Reid as *Queen Poku* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2009)
- *Loin de mon père* (Actes Sud, 2010)

## **Children's**

- *La Chanson de la vie* (for children; 1990)
- *Lord of the Dance: An African Retelling (Le Seigneur de la Danse*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; 1988)
- *Grandma Nana (Grand-Mère Nanan*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996; for children; 2000)
- *Masque, raconte-moi* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes)

- *Si j'étais roi, si j'étais reine* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes); translated by the author as *If I Were a King, If I Were a Queen* (London: Milet Publishing, 2002)
- *Mamy Wata et le Monstre* (*Mamy Wata and the Monster*) (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; Prix UNICEF, 1993; bi-lingual edition London: Milet Publishing, 2000)
- *Le Grain de Maïs Magique* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996)
- *Le Bel Oiseau et la Pluie* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1998)
- *Nelson Mandela: "Non à L'Apartheid"* (Actes Sud Junior, 2010)
- *Ayanda, la petite fille qui ne voulait pas grandir* (Actes Sud Junior, 2007; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes/CEDA)

### **Gladys Casely-Hayford**

**Gladys May Casely-Hayford** *alias Aquah Lalah* (11 May 1904, Axim - October 1950, Freetown) was a Sierra

Leonean writer, daughter of Adelaide Casely-Hayford. She started the Krio language literature.

She studied in Ghana and Wales, danced with a Berlin jazz band, and returning to Africa taught at her mother's Girls' Vocational School in Freetown. Her first poems were published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Her poetry has been widely anthologized.

### **Works**

- *Take'um so*, 1948 (poetry)

## **Bernadette Sanou Dao**

**Bernadette Sanou Dao** (born 25 February 1952 in Bamako, French Sudan) is a Burkinabé author and politician. At age 11 her family returned to Upper Volta from Mali. She attended Kolog-Naba college in Ouagadougou and later Ohio University in the United States and the Sorbonne in Paris, France. From 1986 to 1987 she was Burkina Faso's Minister for Culture. She currently lives in Ouagadougou. She writes poetry, short-stories and children's stories.



## **Micere Githae Mugo**

**Micere Githae Mugo** (born **Madeleine Mugo** in 1942) is a playwright, author, activist, instructor and poet from Kenya. She is a literary critic and professor of literature in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University. She was forced into exile in 1982 from Kenya during the Daniel Arap Moi dictatorship for activism and moved to teach in Zimbabwe, and later the United States. Mwalimu Mugo teaches Orature, Literature, and Creative Writing. Mugo's publications include six books, a play co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and three monographs. She has also edited journals and the Zimbabwean school curriculum. The East African Standard Century listed her among the most influential people in Kenya in 2002 – "The Top 100: They influenced Kenya Most during the 20th century".

### **Early life**

Mugo was born in 1942, in Baricho, Kirinyaga District, Kenya. The daughter of two progressive (liberal) teachers, she received a solid primary and secondary

education in Kenya, attending Alliance Girls High School. She became one of the first black students to be allowed to enroll in what had previously been a segregated academy. She later attended Makerere University (where she gained her B.A. in 1966), the University of New Brunswick (gaining her M.A. in 1973) and University of Toronto (where she gained her PhD in 1978).<sup>1</sup> She took up a teaching position at the University of Nairobi in 1973, and in 1978 or 1980 became Dean of the Faculty of Arts, making her the first female faculty dean in Kenya. She taught at the University of Nairobi until 1982, and has also taught at the University of Zimbabwe.

## **Works**

Mugo is a distinguished poet, and the author or editor of fifteen books. Her work is generally from a traditional African, Pan-African and feminist perspective, and draws heavily upon indigenous African cultural traditions. She has also collaborated with the

Zimbabwean writer Shimmer Chinodya in editing plays and stories for adolescents in Shona.

## **Plays**

- *The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti*, East African Literature Bureau, 1976
- *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, (co-authored with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), Heinemann, 1976

## **Poetry**

- *Daughter of My People, Sing!*, East African Literature Bureau, 1976
- *My Mother's Song and Other Poems*, East African Educational Publishers, 1994

## **Literary Criticism**

- *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, 1978
- *African Orature and Human Rights*, National University of Lesotho, 1991

## **Autobiography**

- *Writing & Speaking from the Heart of My Mind*, Africa World Press 2012

## **Achievements**

- The top 100:They influenced Kenya Most during the 20th century", East African Standard Century – 2002
- Distinguished Africanist Scholar Award – 2007
- Courage Award, Girl Scout Council of Central New York
- President of United Women of Africa
- CNY Women of Distinction Award – 2008,
- Lifetime Community Service Award (CNY Women Syracuse Chapter)
- Beyond Community Recognition Awards, Inc. – 2004,
- Human Rights Award, Onondaga County Human Rights Commission – 2004.
- Rockefeller Foundation Award for writing and publication – 1992

- Ford Foundation Award for research on African orature and human rights 1987–90
- Marcus Garvey Award from the Canadian Branch of UNIA (1985).

## **Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo**

**Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo** (born 1967) is an Ivoirian born Canadian poet and journalist. She was born in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and raised in, Upper Volta and was educated at the University of Ouagadougou. She subsequently studied in Canada, receiving a doctorate from the University of Ottawa and a journalism degree from the Université de Montréal.

She is currently a researcher in women's studies at the University of Ottawa, and the managing editor of Éditions Malaïka.

Her 2003 book *Avec tes mots* won the Trillium Book Award for French language poetry.

### **Bibliography**

- *Burkina blues*. Brossard, Québec: Humanitas. 2000. ISBN 2-89396-196-7.
- *Avec tes mots*. Ottawa: Malaïka. 2003. ISBN 2-913991-23-8.

- *Sahéliennes*. Ottawa: L'Interligne. 2006. ISBN 2-923274-10-5.

## **Grace Ogot**

**Grace Ogot** (born 1934) is a Kenyan author, nurse, journalist, politician and diplomat. Together with Charity Waciuma she is the first Anglophone female Kenyan writer to be published.

### **Contents**

### **Biography**

Ogot was born Grace Emily Akinyi to a Christian family on May 15, 1930 in Asembo, in the district of Nyanza, Kenya - a village highly populated by the predominately Christian Luo ethnic group. Her father, Joseph Nyanduga, was one of the first men in the village of Asembo to obtain a Western education. He converted early on to the Anglican Church, and taught at the Church Missionary Society's Ng'iya Girls' School. From her father, Ogot learned the stories of the Old Testament and it was from her grandmother that Ogot learned the traditional folk tales of the area from which she would later draw inspiration.



Ogot attended the Ng'iya Girls' School and Butere High School throughout her youth. From 1949 to 1953, Grace Ogot trained as a nurse at the Nursing Training Hospital in Uganda. She later worked in London, England, at the St. Thomas Hospital for Mothers and Babies. She returned to the African nursing profession in 1958, working at the Maseno Hospital, run by the Church Missionary Society in Kisumu County in Kenya. Following this, Ogot worked at Makerere University College in Student Health Services.

In addition to her experience in healthcare, Ogot gained experience in multiple different areas, working for the BBC Overseas Service as a script-writer and announcer on the program "London Calling East and Central Africa", operating a prominent radio program in the Luo language, working as an officer of community development in Kisumu County and as a public relations officer for the Air India Corporation of East Africa.

In 1975, Ogot worked as a Kenyan delegate to the general assembly of the United Nations. Subsequently,

in 1976, she became a member of the Kenyan delegation to UNESCO. That year, she chaired and helped found the Writers' Association of Kenya. In 1983 she became one of only a handful of women to serve as a Member of Parliament and the only woman assistant minister in the cabinet of then President Daniel arap Moi.

### **Writing career**

In 1962, Grace Ogot read her story “A Year of Sacrifice” at a conference on African Literature at Makerere University in Uganda. After discovering that there was no other work presented or displayed from East African writers, Ogot became motivated to publish her works. Subsequently, she began to publish short stories both in the Luo language and in English. “The Year of Sacrifice” (later retitled “The Rain Came” ) was published in the African journal *Black Orpheus* in 1963 and in 1964, the short story “Ward Nine” was published in the journal *Transition*. Grace Ogot's first novel *The Promised Land* was published in 1966 and focused on Luo emigration and the problems that arise through

migration. Set in the 1930s, her main protagonists emigrate from Nyanza to northern Tanzania, in search of fertile land and wealth. It also focused on themes of tribal hatred, materialism, and traditional notions of femininity and wifely duties. 1968 saw the publishing of *Land Without Thunder*, a collection of short stories set in ancient Luoland. Ogot's descriptions, literary tools, and storylines in *Land Without Thunder* offer a valuable insight into Luo culture in pre-colonial East Africa. Her other works include *The Strange Bride*, *The Graduate*, *The Other Woman* and *The Island of Tears*.

Many of her stories are set against the scenic background of Lake Victoria and the traditions of the Luo people. One theme that features prominently within Ogot's work is the importance of traditional Luo folklore, mythologies, and oral traditions. This theme is at the forefront in "The Rain Came", a tale which was related to Ogot in her youth by her grandmother, whereby a chief's daughter must be sacrificed in order to bring rain. Furthermore, much of Ogot's short stories juxtapose traditional and modern themes and notions,

demonstrating the conflicts and convergences that exist between the old ways of thought and the new. In *The Promised Land*, the main character, Ochola, falls under a mysterious illness which cannot be cured through medical intervention. Eventually, he turns to a medicine man in order to be healed. Ogot explains such thought processes as exemplary of the blending of traditional and modern understandings, “Many of the stories I have told are based on day-to-day life... And in the final analysis, when the Church fails and the hospital fails, these people will always slip into something they trust, something within their own cultural background. It may appear to us mere superstition, but those who do believe in it do get healed. In day-to-day life in some communities in Kenya, both the modern and the traditional cures coexist.”

Another theme that often appears throughout Ogot’s works is that of womanhood and the female role. Throughout her stories, Ogot demonstrates an interest in family matters, revealing both traditional and modern female gender roles followed by women, especially

within the context of marriage and Christian traditions. Such an emphasis can be seen in *The Promised Land*, in which the notions both of mothers as the ultimate protectors of their children and of dominant patriarchal husband-wife relationships feature heavily. Critics such as Maryse Conde have suggested that Ogot's emphasis on the importance of the female marital role, as well as her portrayal of women in traditional roles, creates an overwhelmingly patriarchal tone in her stories. However, others have suggested that women in Ogot's works also demonstrate strength and integrity, as in "The Empty Basket", where the bravery of the main female character, Aloo, is contrasted by the failings of the male characters. Though her wits and self-assertion, Aloo overcomes a perilous situation with a snake, whilst the men are stricken by panic. It is only after she rebukes and shames the men that they are roused to destroy the snake. In Ogot's short stories, the women portrayed often have a strong sense of duty, as demonstrated in "The Rain Came", and her works regularly emphasize the need for understanding in relationships between men and women.

Prior to Kenyan Independence, while Kenya was still under a Colonial regime, Ogot experienced difficulties in her initial attempts to have her stories published, stating, “I remember taking some of my short stories to the manager [of the East African Literature Bureau], including the one which was later published in *Black Orpheus*. They really couldn’t understand how a Christian woman could write such stories, involved with sacrifices, traditional medicines and all, instead of writing about Salvation and Christianity. Thus, quite a few writers received no encouragement from colonial publishers who were perhaps afraid of turning out radical writers critical of the colonial regime.”

She was interviewed in 1974 by Lee Nichols for a Voice of America radio broadcast that was aired between 1975-1979 (Voice of America radio series *Conversations with African writers*, no. 23). The Library of Congress has a copy of the broadcast tape and the unedited original interview. The broadcast transcript appears in the book *Conversations with African Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Voice of America, 1981), p. 207-216.

## Publications

From the collection of the Library of Congress,  
Washington, DC: Empty BaSeSt

- *Aloo kod Apul-Apul* (1981) in Luo.
- *Ber wat* (1981) in Luo.
- *The Graduate*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980.
- *The Island of Tears* (short stories), Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980.
- *Land Without Thunder; short stories*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968.
- *Miaha* (in Luo), 1983; translated as *The Strange Bride* by Okoth Okombo (1989)
- *The Other Woman: selected short stories*, Nairobi: Transafrica, 1976.
- *The Promised Land: a novel*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966.
- *The Strange Bride* translated from Dholuo (originally published as *Miaha*, 1983) by Okoth Okombo, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1989. ISBN 9966-46-865-X

## **Véronique Tadjó**

**Véronique Tadjó** (born 1955) is a writer, poet, novelist, and artist from Côte d'Ivoire. Having lived and worked in many countries within the African continent and diaspora, she feels herself to be pan-African, in a way that is reflected in the subject matter, imagery and allusions of her work.

### **Biography**

Born in Paris, Véronique Tadjó was the daughter of an Ivorian civil servant and a French painter and sculptor. Brought up in Abidjan, she travelled widely with her family.

Tadjó completed her BA degree at the University of Abidjan and her doctorate at the Sorbonne in African-American Literature and Civilization. In 1983, she went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., on a Fulbright research scholarship.



In 1979, Tadjó chose to teach English at the Lycée Moderne de Korhogo (secondary school) in the North of Côte d'Ivoire. She subsequently became a lecturer at the English department of the University of Abidjan until 1993.

In the past few years, she has facilitated workshops in writing and illustrating children's books in Mali, Benin, Chad, Haiti, Mauritius, French Guyana, Burundi, Rwanda and South Africa.

She has lived in Paris, Lagos, Mexico City, Nairobi and London. Tadjó is currently based in Johannesburg, where since 2007 she has been head of French Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

### **Awards**

Tadjó received the Literary Prize of L'Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique in 1983 and the UNICEF Prize in 1993 for *Mamy Wata and the Monster*, which was also chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century, one of only four children's books

selected. In 2005, Tadjó won the Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire.

## **Works**

### **Poetry**

- *Latérite* (poems; Éditions Hatier "Monde noir Poche", 1984). Bi-lingual edition, *Red Earth – Latérite*; translation by Peter S. Thompson (Washington University Press, 2006)
- *A vol d'oiseau*, Éditions Harmattan; 1986); translated by Wangui wa Goro as *As The Crow Flies* (AWS Heinemann, 2001)
- *A mi-chemin* (poems; Éditions Harmattan, 2000)

### **Novels**

- *Le Royaume aveugle* (novel; Éditions Harmattan, 1991); translated by Janis Mayes as *The Blind Kingdom* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2008)

- *Champs de bataille et d'amour* (Éditions Présence Africaine; Les Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes, 1999)
- *L'ombre d'Imana: Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda*, Actes Sud, 2000); translated as *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* (Heinemann AWS, 2002)
- *Reine Pokou* (Actes Sud, 2005); translated by Amy Reid as *Queen Poku* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2009)
- *Loin de mon père* (Actes Sud, 2010)

## **Children's**

- *La Chanson de la vie* (for children; 1990)
- *Lord of the Dance: An African Retelling (Le Seigneur de la Danse*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; 1988)
- *Grandma Nana (Grand-Mère Nanan*; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996; for children; 2000)
- *Masque, raconte-moi* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes)

- *Si j'étais roi, si j'étais reine* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes); translated by the author as *If I Were a King, If I Were a Queen* (London: Milet Publishing, 2002)
- *Mamy Wata et le Monstre* (*Mamy Wata and the Monster*) (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1993; Prix UNICEF, 1993; bi-lingual edition London: Milet Publishing, 2000)
- *Le Grain de Maïs Magique* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1996)
- *Le Bel Oiseau et la Pluie* (Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes, 1998)
- *Nelson Mandela: "Non à L'Apartheid"* (Actes Sud Junior, 2010)
- *Ayanda, la petite fille qui ne voulait pas grandir* (Actes Sud Junior, 2007; Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes/CEDA)

## **Bessie Head**

**Bessie Emery Head** (6 July 1937 – 17 April 1986), though born in South Africa, is usually considered Botswana's most influential writer.

### **Biography**

Bessie Emery Head was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the child of a wealthy white South African woman and a black servant when interracial relationships were illegal in South Africa. It was claimed that her mother was mentally ill so that she could be sent to a quiet location to give birth to Bessie without the neighbours knowing. However, the exact circumstances are disputed, and some of Bessie Head's comments, though often quoted as straight autobiography, are in fact from fictionalized settings.

In the 1950s and '60s she was a teacher, then a journalist for the South African magazine *Drum*. In 1964 she moved to Botswana (then still the Bechuanaland Protectorate) as a refugee, having been peripherally

involved with Pan-African politics. It would take 15 years for Head to obtain Botswana citizenship. Head settled in Serowe, the largest of Botswana's "villages" (i.e. traditional settlements as opposed to settler towns). Serowe was famous both for its historical importance, as capital of the Bamangwato people, and for the experimental Swaneng school of Patrick van Rensburg. The deposed chief of the Bamangwato, Seretse Khama, was soon to become the first President of independent Botswana.

Her early death in 1986 (aged 48) from hepatitis came just at the point where she was starting to achieve recognition as a writer and was no longer so desperately poor.

## **Writing**

Most of Bessie Head's important works are set in Serowe, in particular the three novels *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power*. One of her best works is *When Rain Clouds Gather*, in which she writes about a troubled young man called Makhaya who runs

away from his birthplace, South Africa, to become a refugee in a little village called Golema Mmidi, in the heart of Botswana. Here he is faced with many challenges, one of which is the fact that Chief Matenge does not allow his presence in the village. He meets a white man named Gilbert and starts a whole new journey into the unknown.

Head also published a number of short stories, including the collection *The Collector of Treasures*. She published a book on the history of Serowe, the village she settled in, called *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. Her last novel, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, is historical, set in 19th-century Botswana. She had also written a story of two prophets, one wealthy and one who lived poorly called "Jacob: The Faith-Healing Priest".

Head's work, which emphasised the value of ordinary life and humble people, was more in touch with an earlier trend in African writing than many recent writers, who have made overtly political comments. Her writing has endured nonetheless. Religious ideas feature

prominently at times, as in the work *A Question of Power*. It is interesting to note that Head was initially brought up as a Christian; however, she was later influenced by Hinduism (to which she was exposed through South Africa's Indian community).

Most of her writing took place while she was in exile in Botswana. An exception is the early novel *The Cardinals* (published posthumously), written before she left South Africa.

In some ways Bessie Head remained an outsider in her adopted country, and some discern she had something of a love-hate relationship with it. At times she suffered mental health problems and on one occasion put up a public notice making bizarre and shocking allegations about then President Sir Seretse Khama, which led to a period in Lobatse Mental Hospital. *A Question of Power* is based partly on those experiences.



## **Honours and awards**

In 2003 she was awarded the South African "Order of Ikhamanga in Gold" for her "exceptional contribution to literature and the struggle for social change, freedom and peace."

## **Legacy**

In 2007 the Bessie Head Heritage Trust was established, along with the Bessie Head Literature Awards. In July 2007 the library in Pietermaritzburg was renamed the Bessie Head library in her honour.

## **Bibliography**

- *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968)
- *Maru* (1971)
- *A Question of Power* (1973)
- *Looking for a Rain God* (1977)
- *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* (1977)
- *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981)

- *A Bewitched Crossroad* (1984)
- *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989)
- *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990)
- *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head, 1965-1979* (1991)
- *The Cardinals* (1993)
- *Imaginative Trespasser: Letters between Bessie Head, Patrick and Wendy Cullinan 1963-1977* (2005)

## **Adelaide Fassinou**

**Adelaide H. Edith Bignon Fassinou** (born September 15, 1955 in Porto-Novo) is a Beninese writer and Benin's General Secretary for UNESCO. She has written four novels in French. Her married name is Allagbada.

### **Publications**

- *Modukpè, le rêve brisé*. Paris: L'Harmattan (Collection Encres Noires no 194), 2000. (130 pp.). ISBN 2-7384-909. Novel.
- *Yémi ou le miracle de l'amour*. Cotonou (Bénin): Editions du Flamboyant, 2000 (142 pp.). ISBN 99919-41-04-5.
- *L'Oiseau messager*. Cotonou: Editions Ruisseaux d'Afrique, 2002 (24 pp.). ISBN 99919-972-3-7.
- *Toute une vie ne suffirait pas pour en parler*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002 (194 pp.). ISBN 2-7475-3344-1. Nouvelles.
- *Enfant d'autrui, fille de personne*. Cotonou: Editions du Flamboyant, 2003 (172 pp.). ISBN 99919-41-39-8. Roman.

- *Jeté en pâture*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005 (228 pp.). ISBN 2-7475-8718-5. Roman.
- *La petite fille des eaux*. Bertoua/Cameroun: Editions Ndzé: 2006 (96 pp.). ISBN 2-911464-12-5. Roman (co-written with 10 other writers).

## **Adelaide Casely-Hayford**

**Adelaide Casely-Hayford**, *née Smith* (27 June 1868—16 January 1960), was a Sierra Leone Creole advocate, an activist for cultural nationalism, educator, short story writer, and feminist. She established a school for girls in 1923 to instil cultural and racial pride during the colonial years under British rule. Promoting the preservation of Sierra Leone national identity and cultural heritage, in 1925 she wore a traditional African costume to attend a reception in honour of the Prince of Wales, where she created a sensation.

### **Early life and education**

Adelaide Smith was born on 27 June 1868 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to a mixed-race father (of English and royal Fanti parentage) from the Gold Coast and a Creole mother of English, Jamaican Maroon, and Sierra Leone Liberated African ancestry. The young Adelaide and her sisters spent most of their childhood and adolescence in England, where her father had retired in 1872 with his family on a pension of 666 poundsterling. She attended

Jersey Ladies' College (now Jersey College for Girls), then at the age of 17 went to Stuttgart, Germany, to study music at the Stuttgart Conservatory. She returned to England, where, together with her sister, she opened a boarding home for African bachelors who were there as students or workers.

### **Marriage and family**

While in England, Adelaide Smith married J. E. Casely Hayford (a.k.a. Ekra-Agiman). Their marriage may have given her a deeper insight into African culture and influenced her transformation into a cultural nationalist. Their daughter Gladys Casely-Hayford became a well-known Creole poet.

### **Return to Freetown**

After twenty-five years abroad, Casely-Hayford and her sisters returned to Sierra Leone. Inspired by the ideas of racial pride and co-operation advanced by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), she joined the Ladies Division of the Freetown

Branch. She rose to be its president. In June 1920, she resigned from the association because of a conflict of interest between it and her proposed Girls' Vocational School. She toured the United States, giving public lectures to correct American notions about Africa.

Back in Freetown, Casely-Hayford embarked on establishing a vocational institution to help girls learn their cultural background and instil national pride. In October 1923, the Girls' Vocational School opened in the Smith family home with fourteen pupils. As principal, Casely-Hayford would have preferred the pupils to wear native dress to school, but their parents rejected this idea.

She spent her later years writing her memoirs and short stories. Her short story "Mista Courifer" was featured in Langston Hughes' *African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems* (1960), a collection of short works by African writers, published in the United States.

### **Legacy and honors**

Casely-Hayford opposed the injustices of the colonial system and advocated cultural nationalism, earning the respect of British authorities.

- 1935, she was awarded the King's Silver Jubilee Medal.
- 1950, she received the MBE.



## **Yvonne Vera**

**Yvonne Vera** (September 19, 1964 - April 7, 2005) was an award-winning author from Zimbabwe. Her novels are known for their poetic prose, difficult subject-matter, and their strong women characters, and are firmly rooted in Zimbabwe's difficult past. For these reasons, she has been widely studied and appreciated by those studying postcolonial African literature.

### **Life**

Vera was born in Bulawayo, in what was then Southern Rhodesia, to her mother Ericah Gwetai. At the age of eight, she worked as a cotton-picker near Chegutu. She attended Mzilikazi High School and then taught English literature at Njube High School, both in Bulawayo. In 1987 she travelled to Canada and she married John Jose, a Canadian whom she had met while he was teaching at Njube. At York University, Toronto, she completed an undergraduate degree, a master's and a PhD, and taught literature.

In 1995, Vera returned to Zimbabwe and in 1997 became director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, a gallery that showcases local talent ranging from that of professional artists to school children. In 2004 she went back to Canada, where she died on April 7, 2005, of AIDS-related meningitis.

## **Works**

While at university, Vera submitted a story to a Toronto magazine: the publisher asked for more, so she sat down to write them. Her collection of short stories, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, was published in 1992. It was followed by five completed novels:

- *Nehanda* (1993), short-listed for Commonwealth Writers' Prize
- *Without a Name* (1994), awarded Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Africa and Zimbabwe Publishers' Literary Award
- *Under the Tongue* (1997)

- *Butterfly Burning* (2000), awarded German Literature Prize 2002, chosen as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century in 2002
- *The Stone Virgins* (2002), awarded Macmillan Writers' Prize for Africa

At the time of her death she was working on a new novel, *Obedience*. Her works have been published in Zimbabwe, Canada and several other countries, including translations into Spanish, Italian and Swedish.

Vera wrote obsessively, often for 10 hours a day, and described time when she was not writing as "a period of fasting." Her work was passionate and lyrical. She took on themes such as rape, incest and infanticide, and gender inequality in Zimbabwe before and after the country's war of independence with sensitivity and courage. She said, "I would love to be remembered as a writer who had no fear for words and who had an intense love for her nation." In 2004 she was awarded the Swedish PEN Tucholsky Prize "for a corpus of works dealing with taboo subjects".

Vera also edited several anthologies by Zimbabwean women writers.

## **María Nsué Angüe**

**María Nsué Angüe** (born 1945 in Ebebeyín (Río Muni), Spanish Guinea) is a noted contemporary Equatorial Guinean writer and former Minister of Education and Culture.

### **Background and early life**

Born to ethnic Fang parents, she emigrated with her family to Spain when she was only eight years old. In Spain she studied literature and discovered her passion for writing. She returned to Equatorial Guinea and worked for the country's Ministry of Culture and Education. In years following, she decided to abandon Africa to permanently move to Madrid, Spain.

### **Writings**

#### **Acclaimed novel *Ekomo***

Her 1985 novel, and most acclaimed work, *Ekomo* was the first novel written by an Equatoguinean woman to be

published. It tells the story of a Fang woman who breaks taboos by speaking out after the death of her husband.

### **Poetry, articles and poems**

Nsué Angüe has also written several short stories, articles and poems. Frequent topics addressed in her work involve women's rights and post-colonial African society. Much of her work is inspired by popular Fang literature.