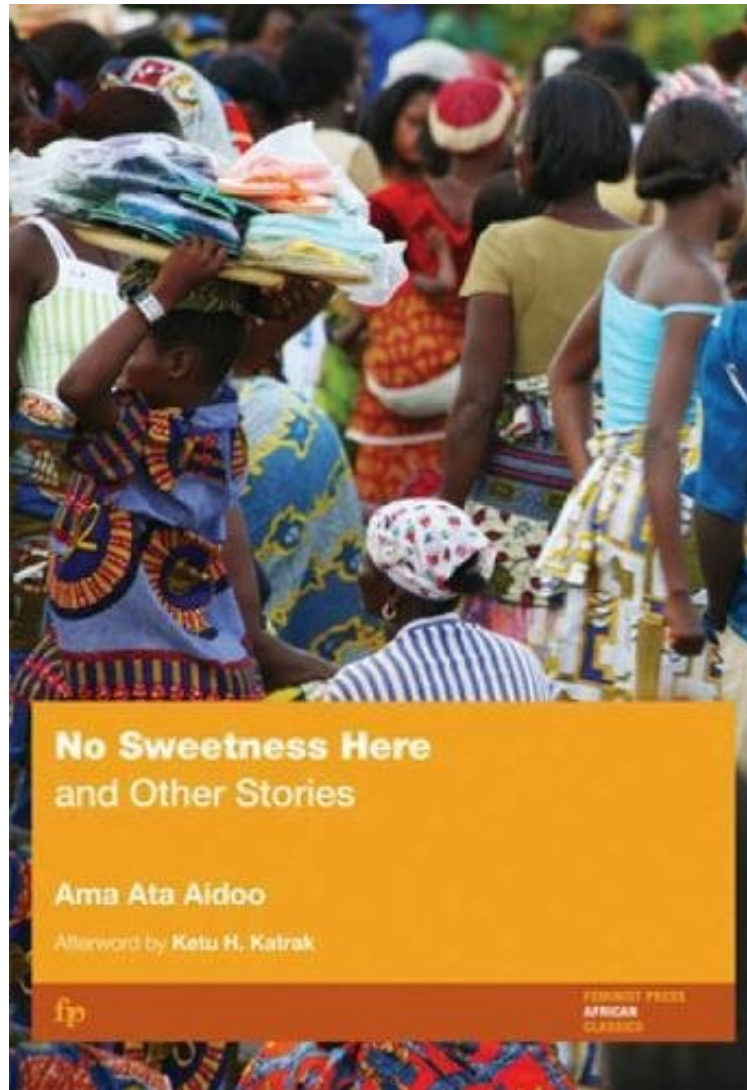


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No Sweetness Here and Other Stories

Ama Ata Aidoo

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Ama Ata Aidoo : No Sweetness Here and Other Stories before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised No Sweetness Here and Other Stories:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Stores of racial, socio-economic- and gener tragedyBy Zachary RoseAma Ata Aidoo, born 1942 and still presently engaged in narration, is a playwright, novelist, short story author, and educator. Aidoo grew up in Ghana, spending most of her early life there and studying in prestigious African universities such as University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast. But she also traveled throughout the Western world as well, attending prestigious American universities such as Brown and Stanford. Aidoo writes both fiction and

non-fiction, and in some cases, infusing the two genres to create potentially real world situations based on the conflicts and struggles between race, authority, gender, socioeconomic status, and nationalism. Aidoo's most widely known book is *Changes: a Love Story*, a powerful feminist novel which earned her the Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories written throughout Aidoo's long career. Many were too short to be published and sold as single editions, though some of these stories were typically sold together with larger novels and novellas. There are eleven short stories in *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*. The stories each have their own distinct tone of racial and gender subjugation, which encompasses both male and female disgrace by the ones known simply as Massas, or Masters. For *Whom Things Did Not Change*, the second story in the series, is a prime example of this racial superiority and masculine degeneration, even though both Massa and Zirigu were of the same race. The only distinction between the two is that Massa has been educated and hence he is a "big man". Big men in the setting *For Whom Things Did Not Change*, whether white or black, educated or corrupt, are superior because of their history of authority, and the authoritative superiority in the psyche of the black commoner. This grossly unfair privilege of authority held over black commoners does not fragment and vanish as the privileged classes would have hoped for, by implementing their constitutions and articles of independence. The inferiority felt by commoners, such as Zirigu, who have grown up knowing nothing but dependence upon authoritative figures is, rooted deep within their psyche. This can be tragically expressed when, long after independence has already occurred, Zirigu asks "My young Master, what does 'Independence' mean?" Another story which crosses every barrier of time, place and culture, is *Certain Winds from the South*. A father, who cannot afford to take care of a child, argues within himself and with the closest members of his family, his mother for example, about the financial prospects of going off to find more profitable work in the South. The mother, M'ma, tries to prevent her young son from practically abandoning his new family by excusing himself under the pretext of financial duress. However, M'ma, and Issa, the new father, are both well aware that financial duress is not the underlying reason for Issa's escape of responsibility. After Issa leaves, without telling his wife Hawa, M'ma concludes something profound. M'ma blames not only herself, not Hawa, nor any of the other women in her family. M'ma blames herself for being a woman, a woman who cannot hold on to her man. This culture of matriarchal blame is pervasive throughout many cultures, and as Aidoo points out here, it is no different in some African cultures as well. When will women stop blaming themselves for the poor choices of their husbands and lovers? Aidoo doesn't give a straightforward answer, but she does throw light onto the subject which has been haunting families since the dawn of time. Though, *No Sweetness Here* is used as the selling point for this collection, I found it to be the least interesting of Aidoo's eleven stories. The story is set in a rural area where poverty, death, and love intermingle as though there is no other way to live for those who have lived on this rural plot of land for generations. The exception is *Chicha*, an educated woman who has come to teach grammar to the poor children. Chicha quickly falls in love with one of her young students, Kwesi. Kwesi is bright, handsome and is the child Chicha would have if she had the choice. One day, Chicha goes to visit Kwesi's mother, Maami, who tells Chicha her hardships and neglect by her husband, Kwesi's father. But Maami also tells of her joy and love for her only son, Kwesi. For Maami, Kwesi is her world. Chicha is charmed by this but also a bit jealous that Kwesi, or a childlike Kwesi, is not her own. One day, Kwesi falls sick from the poison of a snake bite. Panic sets in the hearts of Chicha and of course Maami. The bite is incurable and Kwesi passes. While Chicha realizes just how much Maami has lost. For Maami, Kwesi was not just a son; he was a piece of her, her caretaker, her sustainer, and future provider. Chicha can only begin to sympathize, as best she can, with Maami, but in the end sympathy really means nothing. Chicha goes home, because she has that ability. Chicha, after all, is Western educated and can leave, which is what she does. Loss in the third world is too unbearable for many Westerners, so many avoid it the best they can. Though, if they continue to avoid it how will the skills of privileged Westerners ever be fully utilized where they are most needed? I gained valuable insight while reading Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*. I would highly recommend this text as a whole, or text within this collection, to students who want to taste the hardships of daily life in Africa. This book is also a great introduction to Aidoo's other works, which, God willing, I will be checking out in the future. While Ama Ata Aidoo is not a household name in the United States, her name should definitely be on every high school and college student's reading list in order to understand the racial, gender, and socioeconomic aspects within African culture.

0 of 5 people found the following review helpful. BookBy T. GormanArrived as stated. Terrible book, wouldn't read it if it wasn't required. But alas it was...at least I didn't spend alot of money on it

28 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Tales depict Ghanaian life at onset of independence. By A CustomerA young man leaves his village in rural Ghana to look for his sister, Mansa, in the capital. The last time the family saw her was twelve years ago when she was only ten. Arriving in Accra, the brother looks up Duayaw, a fellow villager, who was his sister's classmate in grade school. Duayaw thinks he's on a crazy mission. Where are they going to find her? Now at the age of twenty-two, she could even be married. The city-wise Duayaw actually suspects worse but being the polite host, he complies. "In the Cutting of a Drink" is one of eleven short stories in *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories* by Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian writer. Aidoo's novel, *Changes*, won the 1993 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Africa region. *No Sweetness Here* was originally published in the United States by Doubleday in 1971. But it first appeared the previous year through Longman of Britain. The last Doubleday printing was in 1972. It was re-issued by the

Feminist Press, the world's oldest continuing feminist publisher, which is primarily concerned with restoring important out-of-print historical and literary works by women. On the surface, "In the Cutting of a Drink" is a simple story. But a lot takes place. It demonstrates well the talent possessed by Aidoo who has also written poems and plays and served as Ghana's minister of education from 1982 to 1983. The story is narrated by Mansa's brother to his immediate family, other relatives, and some villagers. Aidoo cherishes the African oral tradition and in the tale the burden rests entirely with her narrating character. He must sustain his audience's attention and he succeeds. The result of his search is withheld till the end. His amazement of the city sounds exaggerated by today's standards but one has to keep in mind that Aidoo wrote the stories during the decade after Ghana's independence from Britain in 1957. To rural folk, Accra held novelty. "Each time I tried to raise my eyes, I was dizzy from the number of cars which were passing," the narrator explains. At another point he describes his experience while walking along the streets at night with Duayaw: "The whole place was as clear as the sky. Some of these lights are very beautiful indeed." Such descriptions, while captivating to the villagers, are nevertheless delivered in a tone that depicts the city as a crazy place. When *No Sweetness Here* was first published, there were already troubling political developments in Ghana. The country, which holds a unique place in the sub-Saharan region for being the first to gain independence, had a military coup in 1966. Its first civilian president, Kwame Nkrumah, the pan-Africanist and pioneering statesman, was toppled. Taken as a whole, these short stories therefore grapple with the social challenges of the first years of independent rule in the country. Ghanaians, like most Africans, were in between the end of colonial rule and a new nation in the making. Villagers arrived in the city in search of new opportunities. Young Africans--a small elite--returned from western universities and moved into the offices and residences vacated by the British. And corruption by the new public officials began to get noticed. In tackling these issues, Aidoo is a refreshing alternative in the African literary field which is dominated by men. One gets intriguing glimpses of Ghanaian women encountering everyday joys and tragedies. The short stories in the book are really a listening experience. One is either listening to a monologue or conversation depending on the number of narrators. The strength in Aidoo's emphasis on the oral skills of her characters is that they have a lot of room to be themselves. They pronounce words as some people actually do in Ghana. They say "Klase Tri" for "Class Three," "Chicha" for "Teacher," "Kudiimin-o" for "Good evening" and so on. For the unfamiliar reader, the stories can pose a challenge for one must scramble to learn and visualize the Ghanaian setting. The narrators often don't provide any background--they just start unfolding their tales. The book's afterword, written by Ketu H. Katrak, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is useful for it provides some context. Today, words and phrases like "highlife," "nation-building," and "white man's land," which are used by Aidoo, sound slightly archaic though they were in vogue during the heady days of independence. Reading *No Sweetness Here* is to journey back to a period when Africa was supposed to make a fresh start, a period that now feels far away.

In this collection, Ama Aita Aidoo explores postcolonial life in Ghana with her characteristic honesty and humor. Tradition wrestles with new urban influences as Africans try to sort out their identity in a changing culture. True to the tradition of African storytelling, the characters come to life through their distinct voices and speech. If there is no sweetness, there is the salt essential to life, even if it comes from tears, and the strength that comes from a history of endurance.

From Library Journal LJ's reviewer dubbed Aidoo "unusually gifted and creative" when praising this collection of 11 short stories. The aggregate theme of the work is the conflict between traditional rural customs and modern urban Westernized culture. This remains "highly recommended for its literary quality" (LJ 7/71). Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. Eleven stories explore postcolonial life in Ghana for women and men, from African women returning home from the West to others confronting independence and all its ramifications. Varied characters and encounters mark an involving and unusual presentation of varied West African experiences. -- Midwest Book About the Author Ama Ata Aidoo is a native of Ghana, West Africa, where she has been Minister of Education and an activist for human rights, women's rights, and African unity. One of Africa's most distinguished writers, she is the author of fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and political and cultural commentary.