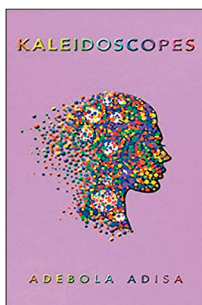


Kaleidoscopes Adebola Adisa

AuthorHouseUK, 2018, PB, 166pp, £8.99,
978-1546298250



HIV POSITIVE WOMEN IN NIGERIA

In this book, Dr Adisa tells 10 linked short stories of women in Nigeria who develop HIV. Consciously or not, she is following a well-trodden path, as Boccaccio's *Decameron* is a collection of tales told, over 10 days, by people in self-quarantine from the Bubonic plague in 14th-century Italy. More recently, *The Women's Decameron* by

Julia Voznesenskaya tells 10 linked tales of women in a maternity home, revealing the plight of Soviet women in Stalinist Russia. The earliest known work of interlinked short stories, and perhaps the origin of all the others, is the *Panchatantra*, 'an ancient Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, arranged within a frame story. The surviving work is dated to roughly 200 BCE, based on older oral tradition.'¹

Dr Adisa's novel does not quite reach these eminent precursors, but has some promising qualities. She can create lively and dramatic characters who stay in the mind. She can make an ageing Western male doctor such as myself understand the world of a young Nigerian woman. She can write page-turning prose. Although the stories are separate, a number are cleverly linked in a chain.

To my mind the book's main weakness is that it is stranded somewhere between two genres. Is it a state of the nation novel about present-day Nigeria, like *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie? Or is it an uplifting morality tale that one might press on the hand of someone to whom one

has just given a positive HIV serology result?

I suspect that Dr Adisa could have written well in either genre, but the mixture is an unhappy one. For me, she should go with her powerful storytelling skills and allow the moral to emerge by itself. But others will disagree, for the quarrel between art for art's sake and art with a political, or in this case a therapeutic, purpose is as old as art itself.

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