

***Ruffled Butterflies* by Ayotunde Mamudu, Parresia Publishers Ltd, ISBN:
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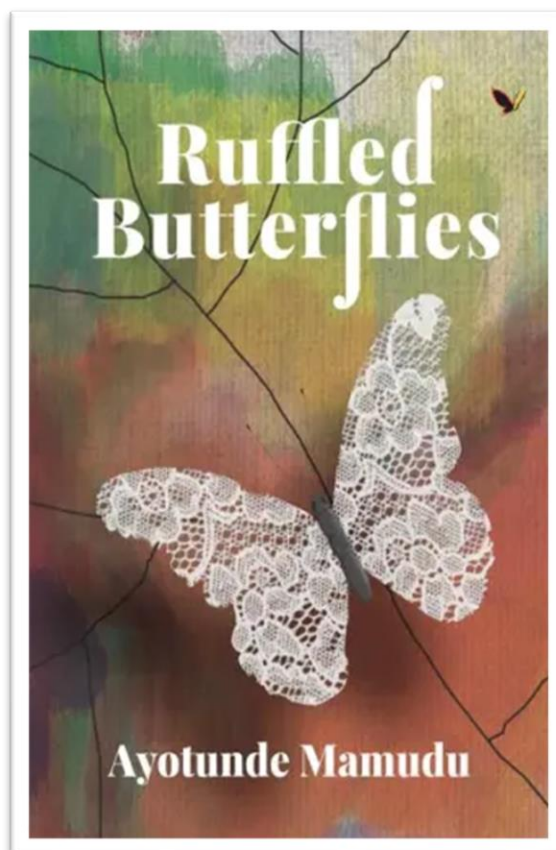
Reviewed by

Anthony James

Department of English Language,
 Plateau State University, Boko, Nigeria.

Email: otajames704@gmail.com

Ayotunde Mamudu's *Ruffled Butterflies* is a collection of short stories that are meshed and embroidered in mostly cosmopolitan marital themes. With just few of the other stories themes woven around contemporary Nigerian challenges like IDP camps, urban poverty and other social and societal struggles. Ayotunde's *Ruffled Butterflies* announces the birth of a young creative author that has been lying in wait for decades. Ayo is the son of a classic lecturer, who was one of the pioneering staff of the Department of English, University of Jos-Nigeria, (late Prof. Ayo Mamudu) who died in the mid-nineties. Ayotunde, reminds everyone who knew his father, of his father's



intelligence and creative skills. Just like his father, Ayotunde currently teaches creative writing at the University of Jos, where he is currently imparting young scholars with his creative skills and ingenuity. It must be stated that the birth of *Ruffled Butterflies* adds Ayotunde to the growing list of 'Jasawa' authors; that include Kachana Ugbabe, Amaka Azuikwe, with Dul Johnson has their grand - father. Ironically, all the aforementioned authors were one-time students, lecturers or even current lecturers of the Department of English, University of Jos. It will also suffice one to note, that the same University also produced a current world-renowned author who currently lectures at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia in the US, Prof. Helon Habla, the author of *Waiting for an Angel*, *Oil on Water*, *The Chibok Girls* and *Travelers*. This explains Ayotunde's creative voodoo skills that have been

horned by the same institution. In a nut shell, the University of Jos has me-too a number of literary authors, Ayotunde being one.

Most of the stories in *Ruffled Butterflies* are built on complementary themes of marriages that hang on linear story lines with trivial issues that look quite subtle on the surface but significantly threatening if not handled with care. Possibly, because, Ayotunde realizes that the marriage institution is an essential fabric of every human society. And therefore, chooses to use these stories to reinforce the message that every marital issue must be handled with tact. In 'Toothpaste' the very first of the stories in the book, Bisi wonders why the squeezing of the tube of toothpaste could cause so much concern to her husband, Kayode. Kayode, on the other hand, sees the squeezing of toothpaste as a reflection of a person's personality. As this becomes an issue in the home, Bisi sits Kayode down for a talk to resolve the matter; 'I just thought that if my husband had a problem with something I did, or I didn't do, he should have told me about it. If he couldn't tell me about it, then it wasn't worth it' (20). Amaka, is easily exasperated in 'Put the Toilet Seat Down' by her husband's misuse of the bathroom. As a way of finding a solution to this poor habit of her husband, she discusses with him as he comes from work; 'Darling, what do I have to do to make you flush the toilet properly,' she asked while caressing his ear lobe. Ehigie, fixed his wife a blank stare. 'You know, if you could take down your panties from the handlebar of my treadmill, then maybe we could start talking toilet ethics (26). This meeting of husband and wife opens Amaka's eyes to realize that her husband's irritating bathroom habit is as a result of her own attitude which he does not like. By implication, Ehigie's bad bathroom habits are a revolt against hers. Ayotunde, uses this story to highlight the need for compromise between couples, if there must be harmony in the home front.

In 'Akin,' Aisha, out rightly ignores the need to discuss a highly sensitive issue like birth control with her husband. Akin wants to have children but Aisha feels otherwise, because pregnancy and child birth will affect her career negatively. Consequently, she uses birth control impact without informing her husband. When Akin suddenly discovers, he was shocked and felt betrayed by his wife, Aisha:

'How could you do this to us?' he whispered in her ears, tightening his hold on her. She burst into tears as well. He didn't let go of her as he felt her body limp. He took a step closer to the drawer where she could lean on support her weight. 'I didn't think you would understand,' she muttered. 'Understand what?' Akin asked (43) She had started a second degree and was hoping to qualify as a consultant

on Creative Arts and Culture. Akin understood perfectly what his wife was saying, but he could not stomach why she took the decision on her own (44).

Akin became agitated and betrayed by his wife's action and as a result, he moves out of their matrimonial home. This story accentuates the need for couples to always discuss all issues concerning their marriages; otherwise there will always be conflicts in marriages where couples are not open and sincere with each other. This is because, any unilateral decision borne out of selfish interest, it will always be seen as a threat to the other party.

'Without You' paints a picture of the trauma and agony of most widows in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Suddenly, Simi becomes a widow just after two years of marriage to Dareng. Gyang, Simi's brother in-law connives with his siblings to loot and deny Simi the belongings of her late husband. According to her; 'these people she had grown up with. Yet they weren't giving her time to mourn her husband before the theft of her possession began' (54-55). This excerpt shows the bewilderment of Simi, who in this case symbolizes the pain, trauma and struggles of most widows in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Ayotunde, uses this story to challenge the Nigerian society with regard to the way widows are treated.

Vera, in 'Vera the Venus Flytrap,' tricks Demola in marrying her on the false excuse of being pregnant. The wedding itself is not cheap, has Demola struggles to meet the demands of Vera's family. Vera herself makes even more difficult demands with her request. After the wedding, she makes the home unconducive and unattractive to Demola, through her manipulative and nagging character. Finally, Demola finds out that he was trapped in marrying Vera. Once he discovers this unwholesome act by Vera and her mother, he immediately loses the taste of the marriage:

'No sir, your wife's pregnancy was barely three months old.' I blinked, Vera and I had been married for about six months and she got pregnant before we got married. I thanked the doctor and stood. I didn't go back to see Vera in the hospital, and honestly, I was not happy the day she walked into the house with her mother. I greeted her mother and nodded at her. From that day, I hardly came home early (66).

Ayotunde, uses this story to highlight the danger of building any relationship, especially marriages on falsehood. Because any relationship that is founded on lies, is bound to hit the rock, no matter how long it is sustained.

The next story in the series is 'Gust of Emerald,' for the first time, Ayotunde, deviates from the theme of marriage, and focuses on other attendant challenges with 'Gust of Emerald.' The story is built around the theme of trauma and psychological pain sports personalities go

through in their day-to-day challenges. This theme is highlighted in the character of Garba, whose team, the Egret's lost an important basketball match to the Benue Giants.

The pain and trauma of the lost was so much on Garba, because the match determined whether his team remains in the elite division. The pain of the defeat makes Garba to hallucinate for days:

Garba chased sleep around the house. He found it in the kitchen but couldn't hold on to it. He got a glimpse of it in the garage, but it simply vanished (71).

With this story, Ayotunde brings to the fore of his readers, especially sports enthusiast the fact that it is not always easy with the actors of these games, especially when they lose a match. But in a general note, the story serves as a life metaphor that teaches that life on its own is a continuous struggle and no one actually wants to lose the battles of life.

Ruffled Butterflies, immediately follows which is the title of the novel. Ayotunde, weaves this story along the line of courtship but a failed one. In this story, Ayotunde deliberately allows his readers to discover the characters of the story because they are presented as actors through their dialogues. He deliberately does not name these actors; he rather uses them to act out the pains of most youths who are finding it difficult to get into a defined relationship. These pains and anguish in the lives of these characters are highlighted in the dialogue below:

'Leave me alone'

'Yeah.'

'Go away, I have not said yes.'

'Give me along ... a kiss ... something.'

'Get off me, you pervert!'

'So, will you marry me?'

'Do you really want to marry me?'

'It's up to you.'

'No, it is up to you ...' (86).

This dialogues, give us an insight into the struggles of the characters that are not sure of whether to marry each other or not. In 'Star Boy' the next story, Sarah finds herself married to a flirt. She wonders how she got herself hooked to such a man, after all the care she took before getting married. Up till her marriage, she had believed that Mike would be a disciplined husband, not until she caught him with a barmaid in one of their outings.

There was a common foyer before the man and female convenience. And there was Mike, in tight embrace with the barmaid. Sarah was transfixed as her husband's lips moved from the barmaid's ear to her neck (89).

When Sarah realizes that her husband is not ready to change, she tolerates him and adapts to his life style. Through this story, Ayotunde advocates the need for wives to be sometimes tolerant with their husbands, if their marriages must work. This story is immediately followed by ‘Mr. and Mrs. Morgan,’ a story which should interest anyone who is conversant with contemporary Nigerian issues, because this story highlights the gory and traumatic experiences of most IDP camps. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan set out from their Vom residence, in the outskirts of Jos, with the aim of visiting one of the orphanages and adopting an orphan. But their experience lives them heartbroken;

They would acquaint themselves with the process of adoption and be advised about the right age of children that an aging couple could keep (107).

But when they acquaint themselves with the orphanage and where these orphans are got from, that is, IDP camps, where they had a first-hand experience of the gory and traumatic experiences of some the children in these camps, they were left in a state of shock and distress; About seven men formed a semicircle, and as Mr. Morgan walked closer to them, he could see what lay in front of them. There were three headless bodies on the ground. The bodies were so small they should have belonged to toddlers. Mrs. Morgan started crying and vomiting. Her husband ... would have also lost it like she just did ... (111).

This story show that Ayotunde, is in tune with his immediate environment and as such, he uses his tool of creativity to bring these incessant killings in Jos and its environs to the world stage. But most importantly, he uses this story to campaign for the need to end these needless and gruesome killings in Jos.

‘Electronic List’ presents the need for couples to always sit and discuss their needs no matter how trivial an issue might look. Lara, is always at cross roads with her husband, Jide. Who suddenly had forgotten how important it means to sit down with his wife to iron out issues, especially at it relates to the grocery needs of his family. In settling this dispute, Lara reminds Jide of their pre-marriage counseling sessions, where they were told of the need to always talk about their home, no matter how unimportant such an issue might look like:

Remember when we went for marriage counseling before we got married? There was this resource person who took us through communication in marriage. He gave us some scenarios as role-play – sessions (126).

Ayotunde, uses this story to warn both married and would be married couples, on the need to always talk things over, no matter how insignificant the matter might look like. Yes, modern gadgets like phones have come to improve our communication needs; yet, nothing can be

compared to dialogues among couples. ‘Soda Cans’ depicts an urban family that depends on the scavenging of their children to make a living. But on a particular day, their first son, Ilia, gives the mother a N1000 note. Unknown to her, it was not the usual N100 note that the children bring daily, that she has been given. When she realizes, she reprimands her son:

‘How did you get this? Return it. Please return it,’ she managed in between sobs. ‘Return it. We are poor, but we do not steal.’ ‘Somebody leave it inside soda can, (sic) Mama, I did not steal it.’ (137).

This story, morally teaches the need to be upright and contented no matter one’s social standing. In a society where virtually everyone is driven by the ‘quick rich syndrome’ it is still possible to find families that are upright, as exemplified by the mother of Ilia in ‘Soda Cans.’ What Ayotunde preaches in this story, is that honesty, contentment and hard work remain a virtue that should be sustained by all.

In ‘Navigation Wars’ (pg. 139-143) and ‘Droll’(pg. 144-145), Ayotunde, brings to bear the influence the television screens of the 80’s and 90’s has on him as a child growing up in Jos. *Space 1999* and *Another Life* were the soaps that captivated the interest of every child living in Jos during this period. No wonder, he squeezes these characters of these soaps without any depth and captivating themes.

In ‘Droll,’ Ayotunde, paints a picture of himself as a child growing up in Jos, through the character of Dayo munching potato chips, a staple in most homes in Jos and its environs. These flaws notwithstanding, *Ruffled Butterflies* announces the emergence of a beacon in the literary arena of the ‘Jasawa’ corridor in particular, and the Middle Belt of Nigeria in general.