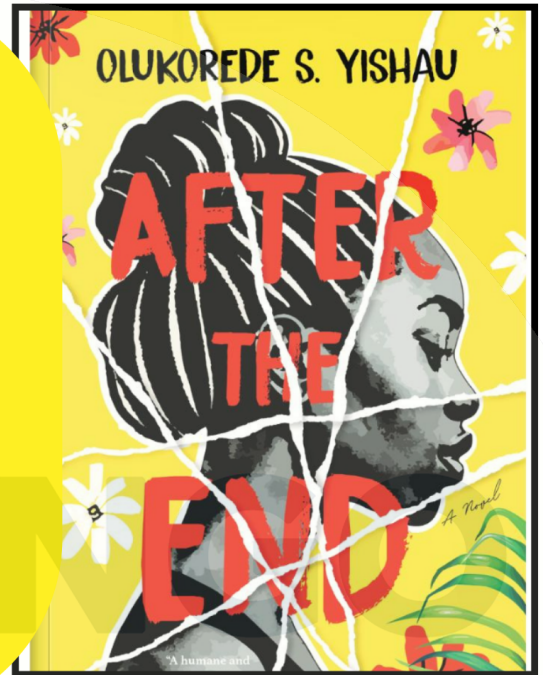


In the End Are Only New Beginnings

Salawu Olajide
July 20, 2024

REVIEW



Lydia's statement close to the end of the book carries the weight of the novel: *I'm here to tell you that happiness is possible, again, Lydia says, And I hope that you find happiness again.* If anything is to be said about the strength of Olukorede Yishau's third book, it may be the sure presence of that feeling of genius-level intention Yishau lets off. *After the End* explores the depth of loss in families, especially those in the Diaspora finding new paths of their own. This genuineness is palpable in almost every part of the work, and is shown in the depth and sincerity of Yishau's impressive characters who carry the emotional weight of the story. The characters are consistently believable like lips from old men.

Lydia and Idera seem to jump right out from a Buchi Emecheta or Toni Morrison title. Lydia cosplays something similar to Adichie's timid Mama Beatrice, and Yishau possibly carved Suliat from the loud and assertive Auntie Ifeoma. Alas, in Google, we find Emecheta's philandering and brutish Francis. But, then, these are far from the old characters we know. We have them here in new, fresh and charismatic clothes. Justus Kensington is as quick-stepped as he is quick-witted. He manages to stay right in the center of the story. Finding him is a thrill. He comes fully mature, largely, perhaps, because of his enigmatic intimidating intellectual stature, randy sex appeal and biting bluntness. The character of Ademola "Google" Phillips is not as fascinating as that of Sulia, just as Chief Fehintola punches less weight than Dr. Balogun. Yishau is able, from this, to build different characters, beautiful worlds in themselves, who are powerful and emotionally compelling. Through them, Yishau crosses through the rabbit hole of polygamy, showing a version of it which stems less from sadistic misogyny than unbridled male lust.

I find the palpable genuineness of *After the End* compelling. There is a certain feel to Yishau's language in this third tour. His style has changed, when compared with his former two books, especially *In the Name of Our Father*. There is now a firmer authority of prose; hands have been passed. But in *After the End*, Yishau comes from a unique — however controversial — perspective.

After the father of a young family dies, his wife is forced to grapple with the revelation of her husband's infidelity.

The revelation of Google's death, which opens the book, is perhaps the least common intro I have read in a while: "Google died on the day UK voted to leave the European Union." The opening line may prod questions that reveal, soon enough, the path to the complexity of Yishau's plot, one that is thrilling in some parts, and dramatic in others. The pacing may produce a moving effect on the reader, but one that could be distracting. Nevertheless, the rapid kinesthesia of the pacing is needful when we consider the novel's brevity and its overall complexity. There are four stories Yishau towers over us: one from Google's perspective, another drawing on the world of Lydia, another on the character of Lydia, and the final on Kensington.

Google's father tipped the first domino when his affair with Mama Yetunde, who later becomes Mama Bukola, the widowed victim of a passion arson by her dissatisfied husband, is exposed. Google himself marries a second wife and builds a new family in the UK. Suliat's husband abandons her and their child. Lydia's father deserts her mother and denies ownership of his child. The perpetual stain on the hallowed walls of morality continues to spread. The men in Yishau's work are typecast, quite unfairly, too, as runaway fathers, irresponsible husbands and unrepentant hedonists. And it is on this point that Olukorede Yishau excels, however controversially, yet again. There is a tongue-in-cheek address to men, even up to the autocratic military leaders who embroil Nigeria in coups and counter coups. Yishau's men are demonized while the women are imbued, successfully, with agency, but are nevertheless portrayed as victims. Yet Yishau's purpose is clear from the get-go; we know where he stands, and he is thankfully unapologetic.

The women in the novel are prey, I noted earlier. They can be mistaken to be mere lizards in a cage with male crocodiles; but they are more. They are victims, on the broader scope, of societal expectations. But the crocodiles are free, and do they become unhinged? The women's bodies are objects of sexual satiation, and Yishau paints sex with unrestrained democracy. It seems Google marries Idera to fulfill his sexual needs, not so much for his obligation to find domestic stability. Even though he has three children with Idera, the small phone, his "portal," the "small cheap thing," which he hides in his pocket, still signals his artful demarcation of his sex lives. Still it is the women who are in the plaintiff box in this book. There are excessive demands of them not just from their husbands but from the children they bear. Still, while the men may have permissible reasons, however often inexcusable, Yishau pays little attention to the underlying complexity of their psyche. There is insufficient justification, for instance, of the misdeeds of Google to Idera and Lydia. Still, Justus comes on the scene waving a white flag. The move is a smart one. Yishau creates a good narrative arc.

There is the rare coterie of reactions one gets when one reads *After the End*. The pace belies weighty consequences and crawls on the pages sometimes. It is hard, then, to place the novel in a tight-box, and for good reasons. Are we reading something close to the plot style of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* or the non-linear flair of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*? Admittedly, Yishau's random plot style is reminiscent of *Dust*. The two novels flit back and forth into time, just as the characters suffer from the pain of the present. Demola is cowardly to the responsibilities of his infidelity. Justus's reputation is worse: he desires love, usually finds it, but constantly avoids the emotional rapport that comes with it. With Yishau, love is a powerful emotion, as much as loss; love is the bond that triggers togetherness. It is oftentimes, too, what functions as the engine of military takeovers and dictatorial juntas. A glint of love can as well be found in the decrees of Yishau's Colonel Dongoyaro, or Major General Babangida, for love often comes from a place of selfishness and pain. This is the type of love that Google shows, one that hurts as it travels and breaks *étagères* in its path.

If I am ever asked what the core of *After the End* is, my response would be that it is sheer love

rather than the consequences, as it may seem, of deserting fathers. It is also how the book lets us into, in Jumoke Verissimo's words, "the frailty of human connections." *After the End* is a good book whose quality lies also in the effective tying up of loose ends and the artful negotiation for a good narrative structure. The props on paper all serve their purposes. In the end, Yishau seems to say that love is what comes after the end. Alas, there is always the last open curve on the chain to allow for a continuation. There's no end but the one we choose.

Nzube Nlebedim is a Nigerian writer, essayist, editor and critic. He is the author of the collection, *At Night Men Take the Lonely Way Back Home*, and is a 2024 Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) prize judge. Nlebedim is the founding editor of *The Shallow Tales Review* and was editor of *Afrocritik* from October 2021 to July 2023. He served in 2020 as the West Africa Field Editor of *Africa Oil and Power*. He lives in Lagos, Nigeria.

