



Arrows of Rain

By Okey Ndibe

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This debut novel from the author of the powerful, universally acclaimed *Foreign Gods, Inc.* looks at a woman's drowning and the ensuing investigation in an emerging African nation.

In the country of Madia (based in part on Ndibe's native Nigeria) a young prostitute runs into the sea and drowns. The last man who spoke to her, the "madman" Bukuru, is asked to account for her last moments. When his testimony implicates the Madian armed forces, Bukuru is arrested and charged with her death. At the first day of trial, Bukuru, acting as his own attorney, counters these charges with allegations of his own, speaking not only of government complicity in a series of violent assaults and killings, but telling the court that the president of Madia himself is guilty of rape and murder. The incident is hushed up, and Bukuru is sent back to prison, where he will likely meet his end. But a young journalist manages to visit him, and together they journey through decades of history that illuminate Bukuru's life, and that of the entire nation. A brave and powerful work of fiction, *Arrows of Rain* is a brilliant dramatization of the complex factors behind the near-collapse of a nation from one of the most exciting novelists writing today.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Arrows of Rain*

"Highly evocative."

—**Nobel Prize Laureate Wole Soyinka**

"The greatest villain in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* is silence."

—***Vanity Fair***

"Smart and often deftly written, a parable of power and the humanity it strips away . . . *Arrows of Rain* remains a novel of resistance—if not political resistance, exactly, then resistance at the level of the soul."

—**David L. Ulin, *The Los Angeles Times***

"Ndibe is a gifted writer and an adept storyteller, who clearly exults in the telling."

—***Essence Magazine***

"A heart-wrenching portrait of Femi Adero, a young journalist who comes face to face with the extremes of political dictatorship and the dangers of pursuing unlikely truths."

—***Daily Nation (Kenya)***

"This novel does what great novels are supposed to do. It creates a new world that, bigger than ours, closer than ours, more intense than ours, brings us back to where we live with a better understanding of just what our lives mean to those we will never see, touch or know."

—**Rick Kleffel, KQED Public Radio**

"*Arrows of Rain* is Greek tragedy . . . It serves as a powerful reminder that the imprint of history—its machinations and cultural usurpations, its elevations and denigrations—is not merely on the subsequent chronicle, but on subsequent individual souls as well."

—***The Cleveland Plain-Dealer***

"A moving and compelling novel."

—***Brooklyn Bugle***

"A fascinating and important story—one that truly must be told."

—***New York Journal of Books***

"This haunting work about the costs of silence shows that Ndibe, who was mentored by the towering Chinua Achebe, belongs in the pantheon of contemporary African-born writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nuruddin Farah, Dinaw Mengestu, and Ishmael Beah, whose powerful stories must be told."

—***Library Journal***

"What do you do, Ndibe asks, when you are faced with injustice and total corruption? When to speak will very likely mean your end? A Kafkaesque, imaginative novel of great necessity and power."

—***Kirkus Reviews***

"An ambitious and brave first novel . . . [that] could jump start the moral political mission of serious African literature begun so well by Ousmane, Ngugi, and the immortal Achebe."

—**Michael Ekwueme Thelwell, author of *The Harder They Come***

"*Arrows of Rain* is a brooding and powerful first novel from Nigerian Okey Ndibe . . . a gritty political thriller with real emotional depth which poses vital questions about our responsibility to bear witness; to be the custodian of 'stories which must be told.'"

—***New Internationalist***

"Alluring, crisp and lucid . . . [Ndibe] is a novelist who portrays his characters, whether poor or rich, weak or powerful, with great complexity."

—**Sahara Reporters**

"*Arrows of Rain* is an eloquent, engaging story. The novel makes evil repellingly ugly by taking off its mask . . . Yes, indeed, 'speech is the mouth's debt to the story'; Ndibe has paid that debt with a telling that sparkles with felicity and insight."

—**Niyi Osundare, author of *Pages from the Book of the Sun***

"First rate fiction."

—**John Edgar Wideman, author of *Philadelphia Fire***

"A blueprint for the second generation of African novelists."

—**Ernest Emenyonu, author of *Tales of Our Motherland***

Praise for *Foreign Gods, Inc.*

"Razor-sharp . . . Mr. Ndibe invests his story with enough dark comedy to make Ngene an odoriferous presence in his own right, and certainly not the kind of polite exotic rarity that art collectors are used to . . . In Mr. Ndibe's agile hands, he's both a source of satire and an embodiment of pure terror."

—***The New York Times Book Review***

"Unforgettable . . . Ndibe seems to have a boundless ear for the lyrical turns of phrase of the working people of rural Nigeria . . . The wooden deity 'has character, an audacious personality,' says one non-African who sees it. So does Ndibe's novel, a page-turning allegory about the globalized world."

—***Los Angeles Times***

"We clearly have a fresh talent at work here. It is quite a while since I sensed creative promise on this level."

—**Wole Soyinka, Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature**

"Dazzling . . . It's already obvious that 2014 is going to be a big year for African novels . . . but Okey Ndibe is bound to set himself apart from the pack. Who doesn't want to read a novel about a good god heist?"

—***The Guardian***

"This original [novel] is packed with darkly humorous reflections on Africa's obsession with the West, and the West's obsession with all things exotic."

—***Daily Mail (UK)***

"Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc* is one of the most impressive African novels that I have read in years. Comic, sad—even tragic—Ndibe is a master craftsman, weaving his narrative with ethnic materials (and surprises) and a profundity that will startle you by the end of the story . . . Ikechukwu Uzundu's journey into his past is as moving and frightful as Brutus Jones' fate in Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece, *The Emperor Jones*. Clearly, this is one writer to watch. Moreover, his insights into both America and Nigeria will take your breath away."

—**CounterPunch**

"*Foreign Gods, Inc.* reads like the narrative of a taxi-driving Faust in modern Nigeria and America. With Moliere-like humorous debunking of religious hypocrisy and rancid materialism, it teems with characters and situations that make you laugh in order not to cry."

—**Ngugi wa Thiong'o, author of *Wizard of the Crow***

"*Foreign Gods, Inc.* is a blistering exploration of the contemporary African immigrant experience in America. Ndibe tackles tough questions: from the shifting notions of home and identity to the nature of greed. In prose which is fresh and often funny, Ndibe draws the reader into the heartbreaking story of Ike Uzundu's attempt to survive in a world which seems determined to crush him."

—**Chika Unigwe, author of *On Black Sisters Street***

"Ndibe takes his readers on a transfixing and revelatory journey from bitter bad faith to hard won, deeply moving and adult redemption."

—**Francisco Goldman, *Say Her Name***

"A challenging romp of gods and styles."

—**John Edgar Wideman, author of *Philadelphia Fire***

"If you've ever sat in the back of a cab silently—or not so silently—wondering where your cab driver is from and what his life is like (and really hasn't everyone?) then you will be captivated by Nigerian writer Okey Ndibe's new novel."

—**Metro New York**

"The best-laid plans often go awry. But they can certainly make for an entertaining read."

—**The New York Post**

"Ndibe writes of cultural clash in a moving way that makes Ike's march toward disaster inexorable and ineffably sad."

—**Kirkus, STARRED Review**

"Neither fable nor melodrama, nor what's crudely niched as 'world literature,' the novel traces the story of a painstakingly-crafted protagonist and his community caught up in the inescapable allure of success defined in Western terms."

—**Publishers Weekly, STARRED Review**

"Unsuppressible, Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is a splendid work of art that belongs in every reader's collection. In a masterful manner, Ndibe manages to blend the traditional belief of his Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria with the challenges that face many young and ambitious African immigrants in the USA. The social benefit of the book is immense."

—**Sahara Reporters**

"Ndibe writes with a folksy inclusiveness. The village humor, the greetings and teasing, lend the Utonki sequences a lyrical magic . . . Into this richly stocked brew of characters, Ndibe skillfully introduces suspense in the final stretch, guiding readers through the tension of getting through customs Nigerian-style . . . As an author with a foot in Nigeria and the U.S., he expertly brings both worlds to life.

—***Shelf Awareness***

"A freshly and heartbreakingly recast tale of American immigration, with all its longings, disappointments, effacements and reclamations."

—***The Cleveland Plain Dealer***

"Wonderfully colorful . . . There's more than a touch of Poe, or perhaps *The Twilight Zone*, in the surreal conclusion of this story."

—***Hartford Courant***

"This is a heist story like no other . . . Ndibe unfurls his rich narrative gradually, allowing room for plenty of character interaction while painting a revealing portrait of contemporary Nigeria. With piercing psychological insight and biting commentary on the challenges faced by immigrants, the novel is as full-blooded and fierce as the war deity who drives the story."

—***BookList***

"On the surface, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is a heist book about a Nigerian cab driver in New York trying to steal an ancient statue from his village in Nigeria. But Okey Ndibe's novel delivers far more than that description suggests, tackling everything from tradition to trying to make it in America, and the way Western countries view the rest of the world."

—***Flavorwire***

"A close associate of the late, great Chinua Achebe, Okey Ndibe adds his voice to a new generation of writers . . . *Foreign Gods, Inc.* features New York-based Nigerian Ike . . . [whose] picaresque journey, gently but incisively told, shows us the vagaries of both American and Africa culture."

—***Library Journal***

"Ndibe's novel takes on serious themes of cultural exchange, but it does so in a decidedly comic fashion. All the characters Ike encounters, in New York and in Nigeria, inject their own brands of humor into the story."

—**Chapter16, Tennessee**

About the Author

Okey Ndibe first came to the US to act as founding editor of *African Commentary*, a magazine published by Chinua Achebe. He has taught at Brown University, Connecticut College, Simon's Rock College, Trinity College, and the University of Lagos (as a Fulbright scholar). His award-winning journalism has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Hartford Courant*, where he served on the editorial board. He earned his MFA and PhD from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. His second novel, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, was selected by *New York Times* critic Janet Maslin as one of her 10 favorite books of 2014. Mr. Ndibe lives in West Hartford, CT, with his wife, Sheri, and their three children.

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CHAPTER ONE

The young woman lay on the sands, her mouth frozen in a smile, as if nothing in the whole world surpassed the sweetness of death. Her face was hardy, but death made her seem older and sadder than twenty. Her eyes bulged glassy, like a grasshopper's. Her bright blue shirt and skimpy flamingo skirt hung loosely about her, rent. A large copper earring dangled from her left ear. Patterned into the circle was the image of an eagle in

the attitude of flight. Her right ear was bare, bloody.

Eyes stared at the sprawled body. For a moment I was tempted to maneuver my way to the front, to ask questions and take notes. But a force from within me restrained this urge. The scene was too stark, the crowd's voyeurism too unnerving. Sweat ran in streaks under my shirt, cold and tingly. I put my notebook under my arm and clasped it tight. This was my first sight of a dead body, and I seemed paralyzed. In quick succession, my emotion changed from shame to anger to fear. The dry cold wind of harmattan blew lazily into my ear, soft like the hum of a lover's breath. I began to move my toes in small circles against the grains of sand in my shoes. The sand's coarse tactility gradually restored my calm.

Near the corpse stood a lifeguard named Lanky, a man with an athlete's body, taut muscles, and veins that crisscrossed the length of his arms. The crowd formed a semi-circle around him, listening enrapt to his story, told with the fervor of an unlikely raconteur surprised with a captive audience. His hands chopped the air and pointed, conjuring up emotions and events that seemed beyond the reach of his words.

Whenever more people joined the crowd, Lanky retold the story for their benefit. He rendered each telling slightly differently, modulating his voice, mixing in pidgin, altering details, padding events, adding new insights, conjectures, rhetorical questions, sprinkling in proverbs for flavoring, his hands all the while deft in the air, kneading their own tales.

He had just concluded when a group of Europeans who knew him strolled onto the scene. One of them, a pudgy man with a wrestler's body and freckles on his shoulders and face, spoke first.

"Gosh! It's rather early to have a drowning customer, isn't it, Lanky?"

The rest of his party, two men and a blonde woman, laughed with the freedom of people who had spent much of the night drinking. The crowd fixed the revelers with shocked glares, but the Europeans were not in the least perturbed. Instead, the blonde, high-shouldered, amplebreasted but lean in a nearfamished, weight-loss fanatic sort of way, became so titillated she began to cough.

"Obviously not, Dan! Obviously not," she said between spasms. "It's never too early for a lifeguard to have a customer. I mean, Lanky here has to earn his living!"

"Hear! Hear!" exclaimed one of the men. Another, his head bald and bony and his chest covered with white hair, spoke in a contrived tone of sympathy.

"Bloody awful to die on New Year's Day. How did this calamity come about?"

The lifeguard's lips quivered with a quick smile and his eyes became radiant as he mounted the orator's platform once again. "My mouth cannot tell everything my eyes saw today. To God!" he swore, dipping his index finger lightly on his tongue and lifting it skyward. "I got here at seven sharp." He raised his left wrist half-way to his face and with his right hand tapped where he might have worn a watch had he owned one. "Seven sharp. Next year will make it six years since I started this job. Six good years," he stressed, raising the requisite number of fingers. "A few months ago the corpses of prostitutes began to appear on beaches like poisoned fish. I never thought that one day I would see one with my two eyes. But this morning I saw this one." He paused, pointing to the corpse.

"True true, it was a big shock. Imagine it: a black woman drowning at seven sharp! If it had been an *oyibo* woman, no surprise at all. Many many *oyibo* who work at the embassies like to swim early in the morning. Like you people," he said, indicating the four Europeans. "Some American businessmen and tourists who stay at Hotel Meridian also come out for early morning swims. I used to wonder why *oyibo* people don't fear cold water. But an American tourist told me about a weather in their country that's as cold as the inside of a fridge. I think they call it . . ."

"Winter!" shouted the blonde.

"Aha, winter!" Lanky echoed. "I even heard it can be colder than a fridge. Imagine that! That's how I knew that what we call cold here is like a joke to *oyibo* people. As for us, cold can make us panic. Before we come out to swim, we make sure the sun has woken up well well and cleared the clouds from its eye. When the sun has warmed the water fine fine, that's when we come out to swim."

He paused again, as though searching for an appropriate tone.

"I came to work at seven sharp and heard a terrible sound. It was the sound of a drowning person. My

spirit-voice told me there was no hope. The harmattan was heavy: I could not even see my hand in front of my face. The sound came again, sharper and louder. Then my spirit somersaulted and told me to do my job, whether there was hope or not. I wiped my eyes and looked in front, no blinking. Still, I saw nothing. That's when my spirit told me to trust my ears. I was about to dive into the water when I saw a ghost rising out of the waves. I nearly peed on myself. To God! But the ghost took a man's shape and even spoke words I was too afraid to hear. Then I saw it was Bukuru the madman. I began to shiver. Everybody knows he's the boyfriend of Mammy Water, the water spirit. True true, I wanted to run away. But the drowning woman cried out again and my spirit-voice reminded me of my duty. I stepped into the water.

"I swam madly to shake away fear. The waves played tricks on me, moving the woman from place to place. I went *fim* this way and her cry came from another direction, so I swam *fam* that way. *Fim, fam, fim, fam*, like fish. By the time I found her she had swallowed so much salt water she was as heavy as a cow. Imagine the likeness!

"You see that spot where a wave is rising?" Lanky thrust out his hand towards the ocean, as though expecting his concentration to freeze the spot. "Yes, right *there*! That's where I found her. Her belly was like this," he said, clasping his hands in front of his belly. "Like a woman pregnant with twins. Yet I managed to bring her out. As I pressed her belly softly softly, horrible sounds came from her mouth and nose. Death had already entered her body and taken a seat."

Lanky paused again, to let his audience absorb the details. Some of them seemed to despair of his long-winded style, but were in no hurry to move on; nothing on the beach that New Year morning rivalled the spectacle of a smiling corpse. Others seemed entranced by Lanky's strange commingling of ocean tales with the story of the drowned woman.

Lanky looked up at the sea of clouds, then spoke in a mournful tone. "God who lives in the sky. God knows I did my best. But it was not easy to fight death alone. If there had been anybody to help me, we would be telling a happier story now." He shook his head, slowly, sadly, seeming to fight back tears.

"When I looked around, do you know who I saw? Bukuru the madman! He stood close to us, sharply watching the woman. The woman turned towards Bukuru. They looked at each other like ghosts sharing silent secrets. The woman opened her mouth to laugh, I swear! Something choked her, so she only smiled. Then she began to shiver: *jijijiji*. The madman turned and walked away, saying something I did not understand. The woman became quiet. Still smiling, but dead."

The spectators remained silent, their gaze on the corpse. In the quiet, the roar of the ocean became buoyant, a belch from an old, far-away world. A young girl's cry pierced the silence. She and her mother had just arrived at the scene.

"Mummy! Mummy!" she shouted, her eyes wide with bewitchment.

"Ssssh! Sssh!" the embarrassed woman hushed in vain.

"Will this dead woman . . ."

"Ssh!"

". . . go to hell?"

"Ssh!"

"Didn't you say . . ."

"Ssh!"

"that bad people . . ." "Ssh!"

". . . go to hell?"

"Shut up!"

The girl trembled, then burst into tears.

"Wait till we get home, silly weaverbird!" thundered her mother, pulling her away.

The new silence was brief. Lanky said, "Why would a dying woman smile? Perhaps she saw the home of the dead and liked it more than this wretched life."

There was a confused chatter, then an old man with a dome of grey hair gained ascendancy over the contending voices.

“She’s an *ogbanje*. Only an *ogbanje* would smile at death. I’m certain of that.”

“What’s an *og . . . og . . . o-g?*” asked a man in a husky American accent, stumbling on the word. “What does it mean, the word you used?”

“*Ogbanje*. They can die and return to life over and over again.

To them, death is a game, that’s why they can laugh at it.

Death only means a brief visit to the land of spirits. Then they return to this life.”

“How does a dead person return to life?” asked the American.

“It’s a secret known only to *ogbanje*,” asserted the old man. “And most prostitutes are *ogbanje*. That’s why they live the way they do. Their bodies are like borrowed things, so they use them anyhow, without regret. To come and to go is the way of *ogbanje*. It’s the music they dance to.”

“Good for them,” said one of the Europeans. “Wouldn’t mind being one of these *ogbanje* characters, myself.”

“Not much hope of that,” the blonde woman said. “I’m afraid when the curtain comes down on you it’ll be for good—in more than one sense.” She laughed tipsily at her own witticism, and others in her party joined in.

Perhaps it was the facetiousness in their attitude that provoked the outburst from someone just behind me in the crowd. “The dead don’t envy the living!” rang the powerful voice. Everybody turned to look. It was Bukuru the madman! He stood, unmoved by the eyes that rained on him. His hair was knotted into long gritty locks that dropped like a Rastafarian’s to the small of his back. His eyes were deep-set, the color of an old lake. Wisps of hair sprouted from his nose above his matted moustache. His toes, long estranged from shoes, strained apart from one another. A strand of cloth held up his trousers. His grimy shirt fluttered lightly in the wind. His stink was musty and doughy, like the sea’s smell.

He was one of the monsters in my childhood dreams, dreams in which a figure much like him chased me across wide veldts and over jagged hills to the edge of precipices; dreams in which I felt myself tripping, slipping, falling—only to awake to the shame of having peed again in bed, the piss still warm, quickly turning cold.

“He knows something about the woman’s death,” Lanky said, pointing at Bukuru. “Otherwise, what was he doing around where she drowned?”

A din of voices tried to answer, but they were drowned out by the shrill commotion of an ambulance as it hurtled into view, flashing its bloody lights. Bukuru took in the scene with the passivity of a statue, as if his mind were focused on more lasting things: the rays of the sun, the wind’s song, the waves which continued to rise and fall, making eternal love to the shore.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gabriel Harris:

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Carmela Williams:

The event that you get from Arrows of Rain could be the more deep you excavating the information that hide inside the words the more you get serious about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Arrows of Rain giving you joy feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in certain way that can be understood by simply anyone who read the item because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this kind of Arrows of Rain instantly.

Molly Maldonado:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make anyone to understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of personal references to get information example: internet, classifieds, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended for you is Arrows of Rain this reserve consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. That book was represented how do the world has grown up. The words styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some exploration when he makes this book. That is why this book suited all of you.

Georgia Cunningham:

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