



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literary Theory and Criticism***Magic realism and its afterlives in African Literature: Between the marvellous and the oral tradition**

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This paper re-examines the role of the marvellous in African fiction, tracing its narrative displacement under dominant realist paradigms and its aesthetic resurgence through myth-infused literary forms. It argues that while early postcolonial works—most notably Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*—strategically embraced realism to assert African cultural agency, this alignment with Eurocentric narrative conventions marginalised indigenous oral and metaphysical traditions. Against this backdrop, the fiction of Ben Okri, Mia Couto, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reclaims the marvellous not as imported magical realism but as epistemic continuity rooted in African cosmology, communal voice, and ritual cadence. Through the lens of orature realism—a genre framework proposed by this study—the paper explores how these authors structurally embed ancestral rhythm, mythic temporality, and spiritual presence. It concludes that the marvellous in African literature is neither aesthetic ornamentation nor symbolic excess, but the ontological ground of African storytelling and a sovereign mode of world making.

KEYWORDS: African cosmology, genre, magical realism, myth, orature**Research Journal in Modern Languages and Literatures**

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Introduction

Magical realism has long served as a powerful literary mode for expressing postcolonial experience, particularly within societies shaped by colonial disruption and layered mythic heritage. Originating in Latin America—most notably through Alejo Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—the genre emerged as a fusion of spiritual and historical narratives, enabling writers to challenge colonial legacies while affirming indigenous cosmological realities.

As magical realism travelled across continents, its encounter with African literary traditions prompted a philosophical and aesthetic reconfiguration. This paper argues that in African fiction, the marvellous is not a decorative flourish but a lived cosmology, deeply rooted in oral storytelling, spiritual belief systems, and communal memory. Rather than adopting magical realism as a borrowed aesthetic, African writers recalibrate its philosophical underpinnings, structuring narrative around indigenous epistemologies and metaphysical depth. The paper advances the concept of orature realism to describe African literary modes where oral tradition and spiritual logic shape realist narrative texture. Unlike magical realism, which juxtaposes the fantastical against rational settings, orature realism emerges from culturally embedded systems—proverbs, folktales, ritual performance, ancestral invocation, and collective voice—where the marvellous functions not as disruption, but as ontological truth. It entwines the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of orature with the grounding of realism, creating literary worlds in which myth and lived experience coalesce.

This conceptual framework builds on the work of Pio Zirimu and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who reconceived orature not as a precursor to written literature but as a dynamic, performative art form in its own right (Finnegan, 1992, p. 14; Ngũgĩ, 1986, pp. 15–18). In this sense, the occurrence of orature and the Marvellous in African literature is not an innovation or an imposition but a *continuity* with the age-old traditions of storytelling on the continent. Filtered through realism, orature reorients narrative structure, temporality, and epistemology to affirm African cosmologies and narrative autonomy. Early exemplars such as D.O. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* embody this continuity. These authors use Yoruba cosmology and oral cadence to weave mythic allegory into narrative form. As Abiola Irele observes, their works reflect “a personal reorganisation of traditional material” that infuses fiction with the symbolic, ethical, and epistemic textures of oral storytelling (Irele, 1981, pp. 184–85).

This paper poses the question of whether African texts often classified as magical realist operate within the same literary ethos as their Latin American counterparts, or if they manifest a distinct framework that calls for alternative categorisation. It argues that African reimaginings of magical realism are not derivative appropriations but genre innovations, grounded in spiritual logic, oral aesthetics, and cosmological coherence. Here, the marvellous is not rupture but resonance: a presence sustained through narrative continuity, not exception. To pursue this inquiry, the paper examines five seminal works—Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Okri's *The Famished Road*, Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*, and Couto's *Sleepwalking Land*.

These texts reflect diverse African engagements with the marvellous, blending ancestral myth, oral cadence, and spiritual sensibility. In their narrative worlds, the marvellous is not illusion but memory; not invention, but philosophy. It constitutes the ontological ground of storytelling—affirming African narrative sovereignty and articulating a decolonial aesthetic rooted in indigenous cosmology and communal voice.

Magic Realism and the Latin American Literary Imagination

Magical realism emerged as one of the most resonant and philosophically complex literary modes of the twentieth century. Defined by its seamless integration of fantastical elements into otherwise realistic settings, the genre subverts Western binaries between reason and myth, the real and the unreal. Within magical realist narratives, ghosts converse with politicians, time loops through ancestral memory, and miracles unfold without spectacle—yet none of these phenomena violate narrative logic. As Ángel Flores described in his influential 1955 essay, magical realism is “an amalgamation of realistic detail and dreamlike atmosphere,” where the marvellous

is not questioned, but accepted as part of the fabric of daily life (Flores, 1955, p. 187).

This literary mode found its fullest expression in Latin America, a region marked by colonial rupture, spiritual syncretism, and mythic consciousness. In this context, magical realism evolved not merely as a stylistic technique, but as a decolonial literary intervention—resisting Enlightenment rationalism and reclaiming indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies. Its philosophical foundations were shaped by cultural hybridity, but its aesthetic traction was also reinforced by political urgency. In numerous Latin American nations—including Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina—where authoritarian regimes censored dissent and persecuted intellectuals, magical realism offered writers a form of strategic ambiguity. Through allegory, myth, and marvellous disruptions, they veiled critique beneath narrative enchantment, evading reprisal while staging resistance.

Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban novelist and musicologist, formalised the notion of the Marvellous in his 1949 prologue to *The Kingdom of This World*, coining the term *lo real maravilloso* (“the marvellous real”). For Carpentier, Latin America’s historical and cultural texture was inherently marvellous; it did not require fictional embellishment, because miracle and myth were already inscribed into its social imagination (Carpentier, 1949, pp. vii–x). His framing reoriented realism itself, allowing histories shaped by legend, spirituality, and embodied memory to coalesce within literary form.

Gabriel García Márquez expanded Carpentier’s premise into a sweeping literary cosmology. His seminal novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) introduces Macondo—a town where magical occurrences unfold with bureaucratic calm and generational trauma ripples through political upheaval. Time loops through the Buendía family saga, and spirits coexist with revolutionary forces. Márquez’s deadpan tone, mythic layering, and cyclical temporality exemplify magical realism’s capacity to rewrite history, mythologise grief, and affirm pluralistic realities. Beneath its mythical surface, the novel offers a trenchant allegory of Colombian violence and political failure.

Although Jorge Luis Borges is not uniformly categorised within the genre, his philosophical fiction profoundly shaped magical realism’s intellectual scaffolding. Stories such as “The Aleph” and “The Garden of Forking Paths” explore infinite temporality, layered perception, and epistemological paradoxes—conceptual concerns that continue to animate the genre’s interrogation of knowledge and literary representation. Borges’s metafiction introduced Latin American literature to ontological fluidity and formal play, adding speculative depth to its narrative possibilities. As Louis Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris contend, Borges represents “the metaphysical parent of magical realism,” cultivating a literary field in which ideas about reality, cognition, and time are narratively destabilised (Zamora & Faris, 1995, p. 5).

The conception of magical realism as a distinctly Latin American innovation finds strong support across literary and scholarly traditions. Flores’s early theorisation located its origins with Borges, while Gerald Martin later championed Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias—particularly *Mr. President* and *Men of Maize*—as the true architect of Latin American magical realism. Asturias’s blend of indigenous mythology and political allegory demonstrates the genre’s potential to critique authoritarian regimes while affirming cultural sovereignty. His surreal and often dreamlike prose masked direct confrontation, making it possible to expose dictatorship without triggering state retribution. Martin’s claims underscore the view that magical realism did not drift into Latin America from elsewhere, but rather emerged organically from its historical experience, spiritual topographies, and political exigencies (Martin, 1989, pp. 121–27).

Wendy B. Faris, one of the genre’s foremost theorists, articulated a codified schema in her study *Ordinary Enchantments* (2004). She identified key traits such as irreducible magic, merging of realms, and unsettling doubt—arguing that magical realism is not merely a literary affectation but a mode of resistance uniquely suited to postcolonial societies navigating fractured pasts and visionary futures (Faris, 2004, pp. 7–11). Zamora likewise framed the genre as a global movement with Latin American roots—one that destabilises hegemonic narratives and reimagines the porous boundaries between history, myth, and imagination (Zamora & Faris, 1995, pp. 3–6, 75–84).

Together, these thinkers reaffirm magical realism's place as a literary genre born from rupture—colonial, spiritual, and political—and designed to heal through wonder. Its narrative logic affirms that indigenous cosmologies, historical trauma, and metaphysical inquiry do not reside in contradiction, but in communion. In Latin America, it has served as both a celebration of mythic consciousness and a shield against political repression—allowing writers to construct layered realities that critique power while evading censure.

Orature and African Reimagining of the Marvellous

As magical realism travelled from its Latin American origins into African literary landscapes, it encountered traditions not merely stylistically distinct, but epistemologically divergent. In African cosmologies, the marvellous is not a literary ornament or aesthetic rupture—it is a lived reality, embedded in oral traditions, spiritual consciousness, and communal memory. African writers engaging with the marvellous do not replicate Latin American techniques; rather, they recalibrate the genre's philosophical foundations through the expressive logic of orature—a term coined by Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu to replace the oxymoronic “oral literature” and affirm oral tradition as a legitimate literary mode (Finnegan, 1992, p. 14; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, pp. 15–18). Yet this transformation has not gone uncontested. A growing body of scholarship has questioned the critical tendency to impose the label *magical realism* on African texts, arguing that such categorisation flattens cultural specificity and misrepresents indigenous modes of storytelling. Graham Riach (2018) notes that African writers have frequently resisted the term, viewing it as reductive and misaligned with the philosophical and ontological foundations of their work. Similarly, Lydie Moudileno (2013, pp. 89–91) critiques the “uncritical generalisation” of magical realism in African literary criticism, warning that its continued use can obscure culturally embedded frameworks such as animist realism, ancestral realism, and speculative indigenous visions.

This concern is particularly evident in the reception of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. While the novel has often been hailed as a hallmark of magical realism, several scholars have highlighted the limitations of that designation. Monica Zucarello (2005, p. 112) and Moussa Issifou (2010, pp. 77–79) contend that Okri's narrative is informed more by Yoruba metaphysics and the abiku myth than by the stylistic hallmarks of Latin American fiction. For these critics, the marvellous in Okri's work emerges from a spiritual logic deeply rooted in African cosmology, not from literary affectation. Okri himself has expressed discomfort with the magical realist label, stating that it inadequately captures the visionary and metaphysical depth of his storytelling.

Mia Couto's fiction has provoked similar debate. While international critics have often situated his work within the magical realist canon, others—including David Brookshaw (2006, pp. 134–36) and Patrick Chabal (2009, pp. 58–61)—emphasise the distinctiveness of Couto's narrative style, shaped by Mozambican oral tradition, linguistic creolisation, and post-war psychohistorical rupture. Chesca Long-Innes (1998, p. 41) suggests that Couto's surrealism is not aesthetic indulgence but an imaginative response to trauma and spiritual fragmentation. Couto himself distances his work from magical realism, preferring to describe it as a re-enchantment of language and landscape through indigenous sensibility.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* and *Matigari* have also been interpreted through the lens of magical realism, though an increasing number of scholars now interrogate that framing. Malika Bouhadiba (2016, pp. 93–95) argues that Ngũgĩ's use of the marvellous is not borrowed from Latin American precedents but rooted in Gikuyu oral traditions, spiritual allegory, and political satire. His narrative choices are ideologically and culturally deliberate, intended to challenge neocolonial regimes and assert African epistemological autonomy. Timuçin Edman (2017, p. 88) further contend that Ngũgĩ's storytelling resists imported genre boundaries, favouring instead a decolonial literary praxis anchored in ancestral voice and communal temporality. Ngũgĩ has long advocated for the centrality of African languages and orature, situating his fiction within a lineage of cultural resistance and narrative re-indigenisation.

Importantly, while African writers do not typically use the marvellous as a cloak for political dissent—unlike some of their Latin American counterparts—their work nonetheless deploys spiritually grounded narrative forms to stage critique. In repressive contexts, authors like Ngũgĩ and Couto have reconfigured mythic logic,

oral genres their cadence, and symbolic interaction to expose authoritarian absurdities and historical trauma without abandoning indigenous frames of meaning. Their resistance is not veiled in fantastical ambiguity but enacted through cosmologies that themselves serve as counter-narratives to imposed realities. The marvellous becomes the architecture of dissent, not its disguise.

In light of these tensions, several scholars have proposed alternative genre frameworks to better describe African literary engagements with the marvellous. Fiona Moolla (2012) introduces the notion of *orature realism* as a model that accommodates spiritual embodiment, oral aesthetics, and mythic temporality. Mshai Mwangola (2015, cited in Kaboré, 2014, p. 15) similarly theorises performance-centred narrative modes in which ancestral knowledge and communal voice constitute the architecture of story. James Hurd Nixon (2024) and Jeff Carreira (2010) have described these literary operations as *spiritual realism*, emphasising metaphysical truths grounded in indigenous systems of belief. Oritsegbubemi Oyowe (2022, pp. 41–67) and Lindokuhle Gama (2024, pp. 96–110) have articulated a vision of *ancestral realism*, wherein the presence of ancestors is rendered not as fantastical invention but as an ontological constant in the African imaginary.

These frameworks affirm that African narratives do not require the scaffolding of magical realism to validate their philosophical depth or artistic innovation. Rather, they reflect sovereign literary traditions in which the marvellous is woven into the epistemic fabric of everyday life. *Orature realism*, in particular, articulates how storytelling emerges from—and continually returns to—the cadence, ethics, and spirituality of collective memory. In doing so, it rejects borrowed binaries and reclaims genre categorisation as a space of cultural affirmation.

Thus, while magical realism remains a useful comparative tool in transcontinental literary analysis, its indiscriminate application to African fiction can obscure more than it reveals. Acknowledging the distinct philosophical and performative dimensions of African storytelling allows for a richer understanding of the marvellous—not as imported magic, but as indigenous memory, belief, and narrative sovereignty.

Return of the Marvellous: Okri, Couto, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Recovery of African Orature

The realist trajectory shaped by *Things Fall Apart* (1958) offered African literature a canonical model grounded in historical fidelity, psychological complexity, and linear narrative structure. Chinua Achebe’s approach aligned closely with the conventions of the European novel, rendering African fiction legible to Western audiences and publishing markets. His seminal work inaugurated a paradigm that privileged realism as the normative aesthetic—endorsed both institutionally and critically. As Biodun Jeyifo notes, Achebe’s realist modernism became “a benchmark of authenticity,” guiding successive generations of African writers towards literary styles intelligible to global gatekeepers (Jeyifo, 2000, p. 41).

However, the ascent of realism came at considerable cost. It distanced African literary production from the mythic and oral traditions that had long defined expressive culture across the continent. As Harry Garuba argues, African authors were compelled to compose “in a language of the coloniser, through forms recognisable to the coloniser,” thereby constraining indigenous cosmological nuance and spiritual texture within Western literary frameworks (Garuba, 2003, p. 263). In this context, realism was not merely a formal choice—it became an instrument of legibility, regulating what was deemed literature and what was dismissed as superstition or folklore.

Against this backdrop, Ben Okri, Mia Couto, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o enact a sustained recovery of the marvellous—not as stylistic embellishment, but as ontological foundation. Their works perform a return to orature, not nostalgically, but structurally—reimagining the African novel through recursive cadence, mythic temporality, and spiritual permeability. This paper subscribes to the concept of *orature realism* to describe their approach. This is to say that the works follow a literary mode wherein realism is refracted through oral aesthetics, communal rhythm, and metaphysical coherence. Orature realism rejects binary models—neither realist nor magical realist in the Latin American mould—and reasserts African cosmology as the structuring force of narrative.

Unlike Latin American magical realism, where the marvellous has at times functioned as strategic allegory to critique authoritarianism from behind a veil of narrative ambiguity, African writers rarely adopt such evasive tactics. Their narrative worlds confront political and social disruption, not through indirect metaphor, but through culturally coherent structures of belief, symbolism, and oral performance. The marvellous becomes the medium of critique—not a shield from power, but a spiritually grounded challenge to it.

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) is an excellent example of this. In the novel, Okri offers a metaphysical reconfiguration of African prose fiction rooted in Yoruba belief systems. Azaro, the protagonist, is an abiku—a spirit child suspended between realms—whose perceptions shape the narrative's temporal and metaphysical fabric. His world pulses with ancestral echoes, spectral intrusions, and spiritual negotiations. These phenomena are not allegorical; they reflect a cosmology in which the metaphysical constitutes reality.

Embedded within Azaro's existence is Africa's cyclic conception of time: a worldview where time is nonlinear, recursive, and marked by continuity between the spiritual and material realms. As an abiku, Azaro's repeated passage between life and death dramatizes this cyclical temporality, echoing the rhythms of Yoruba cosmology in which reincarnation and ancestral presence are ever-active forces. His visions and spectral encounters do not disrupt the narrative but affirm an ontology in which past, present, and future coalesce in mythic time.

Okri's narrative structure mimics oral storytelling: time folds and loops, images recur, and spirits drift across scenes without the need for rational explanation. As Abiola Irele notes, Okri "transposes traditional African forms into a visionary modernist idiom," fusing mythic logic with lyrical innovation (Irele, 2001, p. 127). Brenda Cooper refers to this poetics as "sacred realism," a mode in which ritual, dream, and belief are treated as epistemological constants (Cooper, 1998, pp. 29–31). Vanessa Guignery further suggests that Okri's fiction enables readers to "see with new eyes," engaging a mythic perception that resists empirical containment (Guignery, 2009, p. 77). Here, myth functions not as metaphor but as narrative architecture. Within this architecture, the abiku figure becomes not only a metaphysical symbol but also a temporal metaphor—an embodiment of Africa's cyclical temporality, wherein events unfold through spiritual resonance rather than linear progression.

Mia Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* (1992), emerging from the ruins of the Mozambican civil war, unfolds within a landscape charged with ancestral presence and linguistic fluidity. Its dual narrative—Tuahir and Muidinga's physical journey, interwoven with Kindzu's journal—mirrors the multi-layered structure of oral storytelling, where tales echo, loop, and interrupt each other. This non-linear framework destabilises colonial temporality and reanimates indigenous mythic time, where history is not a linear progression but a recursive unfolding of spiritual and material entanglements.

Couto's prose draws deeply from Ronga cosmology, imbuing everyday detail with spiritual resonance: rivers speak, landscapes dream, and death is porous. The marvellous in *Sleepwalking Land* signals epistemic continuity rather than magical rupture, affirming a worldview in which the metaphysical is not an aberration but a constant. The novel's temporal architecture resists Western chronologies, instead embracing a cyclical rhythm where memory, myth, and dream coalesce. Kindzu's journal, read aloud by Muidinga, becomes a ritual act—an invocation of ancestral time that folds the past into the present and gestures toward an emergent future. As Confidence Joseph argues, Couto's "hydro-mythic poetics" generate a genre space in which fluidity—linguistic, ontological, and metaphysical—is central to narrative organisation (Joseph, 2024, p. 3). This fluidity is not merely thematic but structural: the text itself flows like a river, meandering through trauma, myth, and longing. Couto's stylised creolisation—through neologism, syntactic elasticity, and semantic layering—resists colonial grammar and affirms cultural voice, crafting a language that is as porous and generative as the landscapes it describes.

In Couto's fictional world, storytelling becomes liquid—rippling across memory, myth, and the unknowable. The porous boundaries between life and death, past and present, self and other, reflect a cosmology in which transformation is perpetual and identity is relational. Here, myth functions not as metaphor but as

narrative infrastructure, enabling a reimagining of time, space, and being. *Sleepwalking Land* thus offers not only a post-war reckoning but a metaphysical cartography—one in which the spirit world is not beyond but within, and where narrative itself becomes a sacred current.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) represents a radical re-inscription of African narrative sovereignty through both language choice and structural form. Composed initially in Gikuyu and later self-translated into English, the novel bypasses not only the colonial medium but also the English aesthetic paradigm—including Chinua Achebe's modernist intervention in *Things Fall Apart*—to engage directly with the Gikuyu oral tradition as its primary source of inspiration. This is not merely a linguistic shift; it is an epistemological repositioning. As Ngũgĩ insists in *Decolonising the Mind*, language is the “carrier of culture”—to write in Gikuyu is to write from within a cosmology, rather than from its margins (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 16).

The novel performs oral satire: it is polyphonic, participatory, episodic, and improvisational. Kamĩtĩ's transformation into the wizard is not supernatural—it is communal invention, enacted through ritual, belief, and shared imagination. This embodies African mythic logic, wherein meaning is collective and reality is shaped through symbolic interaction. Simon Gikandi observes that Ngũgĩ “deploys orature not simply as theme but as formal structure,” weaving mythic coherence into the scaffolding of the text (Gikandi, 2011, p. 89). The grotesque elements of the novel—absurd bureaucracy, spiritual ascension, divine architecture—echo Bakhtin's carnivalesque, yet they derive from Gikuyu metaphysics, not European parody (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 11–15).

Ngũgĩ's aesthetic connects directly with D.O. Fagunwa, whose use of Yoruba in *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* foregrounds spiritual rhythm, oral cadence, and ancestral allegory. Both authors assert genre sovereignty by locating literary form within indigenous language, spiritual ecology, and communal performance. Their texts recover orature not simply as thematic backdrop, but as structuring principle—redefining the novel through cosmological continuity and epistemic resilience. In both cases, myth is not decorative—it is foundational.

Collectively, Okri, Couto, and Ngũgĩ enact a paradigm shift in African literature. Their fiction does not merely gesture toward the marvellous—it redefines realism through the lens of orature. Spiritual presence, communal voice, and mythic time are not additions to plot—they are the plot. Form echoes oral storytelling: recursive, rhythmic, polyphonic. Language becomes ceremony; memory becomes architecture. Orature realism reframes the marvellous as ontological necessity—foregrounding storytelling as cosmological performance.

Unlike Latin American magical realism, which often deploys irony, rupture, or allegorical layering to critique historical trauma and political absurdity, African orature realism positions the marvellous as continuous and lived. In Latin American texts—such as García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—the marvellous is often estranged from the everyday, functioning as allegory or metaphor to illuminate sociopolitical critique. By contrast, Okri, Couto, and Ngũgĩ embed the marvellous within the epistemological fabric of daily life. Spirits, ancestors, and metaphysical symbols do not rupture reality—they constitute it. In this sense, African orature realism is not magical realism in disguise; it is a distinct aesthetic rooted in oral tradition, spiritual ecology, and communal imagination. Okri's abiku child, Couto's dreaming landscapes, and Ngũgĩ's communal satire are not fantastical intrusions but expressions of a cosmology in which the sacred and the social are inseparable. Where Latin American magical realism often blurs boundaries to destabilize reality, African orature realism affirms porousness as a cultural constant. Together, these writers offer not just a literary innovation but a metaphysical reorientation—one that insists on the validity of indigenous knowledge systems and the centrality of orature in shaping narrative form. Their work invites readers to inhabit a world where storytelling is not just art but ceremony, and where myth is not a departure from realism but its deepest expression.

In doing so, Okri, Couto, and Ngũgĩ reanimate a literary lineage first shaped by Fagunwa and Tutuola. Yet they advance it through linguistic radicalism, formal invention, and political ambition. Their narratives challenge the dominance of postcolonial realism, destabilise Western genre taxonomies, and restore ancestral memory to the heart of African literary creation. In their hands, storytelling becomes not merely narration—but worldmaking, genre reimagination, and cultural reclamation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the global journey of magical realism, tracing its emergence in Latin America and its interpretive encounter with African literary traditions. It has argued that while Latin American writers often deploy the marvellous to interrogate postcolonial histories through rupture, allegory, and irony, African authors engage it as continuity—integrating it structurally within oral cadence, spiritual presence, and cosmological logic.

Latin American magical realism is shaped by hybrid cultural legacies and the enduring tension between European rationalism and indigenous mysticism. Writers in this tradition frequently use the marvellous to destabilise realism—employing surprise, contradiction, and metaphor to challenge historical narratives and political authority. In contrast, African fiction evolves from storytelling traditions where the marvellous is ontologically real: it is neither disruptive nor ornamental, but fundamental to the texture of narrative life. Spirits, ancestral voices, and mythic temporality are not narrative intrusions—they are constitutive of epistemological and aesthetic coherence.

Through the works by D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Mia Couto, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, this study has demonstrated that African literature reconfigures realism through orature—fusing mythic rhythm, communal temporality, and metaphysical continuity. These authors do not graft fantastical elements onto realist structures; instead, they rebuild narrative form through indigenous frameworks of knowing and being. Their fiction enacts *orature realism*—a genre mode grounded in ritual performance, ancestral memory, and spiritual resonance.

While magical realism remains a valuable comparative lens, its indiscriminate application to African fiction risks obscuring genre sovereignty and misreading culturally embedded epistemologies. African narratives treat the marvellous not as metaphor or rupture, but as embodied memory and ontological presence. It reconstitutes realism—not externally or ironically, but from within the cosmological worldview of the communities whose stories it sustains.

Ultimately, this paper affirms that African fiction does not operate within the same literary ethos as its Latin American counterparts. It enacts a distinct aesthetic and philosophical paradigm that demands its own terminology and critical understanding—where myth becomes memory, orature becomes realism, and storytelling becomes a mode of reclamation. African literature does not merely participate in magical realism—it reshapes the genre through sovereign narrative logics rooted in spiritual depth and cultural continuity.

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