

## RE-THINKING MAGIC REALISM AND POSTCOLONIALITY IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *WIZARD OF THE CROW*

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### **Abstract**

**T***his paper interrogates the place of magical realism in African literature. It unveils the fact that the novelist's imagination must go beyond realism if he/she is to adequately represent the irregularities in his society. One possible way of representing this is through magical realism. In literature magical realism is a narrative strategy that combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that the marvellous grows organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between. In literature this strategy has become debased, with critics referring to it as shallow and dangerous. Therefore, this paper unveils the fact that magical realism is not shallow or dangerous but a contemporary that can be used for political criticism. This paper evaluates Ngugi wa Thiongo's use of magical realism to mock postcolonial African regime is x-rayed. Ngugi mocks leadership in Africa through manipulation of the realistic mode, which helps effectively in representing political issues in Africa. This paper is hinged on Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybridity.*

**Keywords:** **Magical realism, Fantastic, Postcolonial, Political criticism.**

### **Introduction**

Magical realism happens when a highly detailed realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe. Magical realism naturalizes and normalizes the supernatural. Magical realism is a narrative strategy that combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seem to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them (Faris, 2014). The origin of magical realism is traceable to the aftermaths of the First World War (1914-1918) when Germany, squashed by a crushing defeat, weighed down by a national trauma, and burdened by the demands of reparation imposed on it by allies, began to make efforts to find a new meaning to the unfortunate reality.

Magical realism began in art history, having been coined by Franz Roh in 1925 to describe European paintings (Faris, 2014). For him, magical realism was presented as a reaction to expressionism's more abstract style and to mark a return to realism. Expressionism was a movement in literature and other parts of Germany that emphasized and supported arts departure from realistic portrayal or depiction of events, incidents, and situations in the world by expressing visionary and powerfully emotional states of the mind (Ifejirika, 2014). Expressionism which seeks to convey personal inner experience through the distortion of natural images had run its course. Several artists began to experiment with this new form, labelled *Magischer Realismus* (Magical realism).

Magical realism's multicultural perspective often resonates in the peripheral and colonized regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, India, Eastern Europe, Africa. But the narrative strategy is becoming less and less marginal, even though it retains the charm of the marginal position (Cooper, 2004). In 1980, John Barth rejected membership in any imaginary writer's club that did not include Garcia Marquez, praising *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a prime example of replenished postmodern fiction. Barth's statement represents an important shift in literary relations and signals an increased worldwide recognition of magical realism – according to John Updike, writing "a new widely available elixir" (111 – 116). Both a cause and an effect of magical realism's international success, its decentring of contemporary literary discourse is the fact that its master texts are widely dispersed.

The novel that put 'magical realism' on the international literary map was *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and it came from the small Latin American country of Colombia. What seems to be increasingly regarded as a second definitive example, is *Midnight's Children* from India. Both of these are aggressively postcolonial texts. A third, Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, is from Germany and locates the final (albeit chronologically first) apex of this far-flung triangle in Europe so that it is not only a postcolonial style. Other magical realist writers include Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, Isabel Allende in Chile, Italo Calvino in Italy, and John Fowles. These writers weave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details together with the fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myths and fairy tales

Thus, like magical realism in Latin America, and partial response to it, African magical realism developed out of the first wave of postcolonial, indigenist novels inspired by traditional myths and oral narratives, such as *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* by Amos Tutuola or *The Forest of a thousand Demons* by D.O. Fagunwa, and the nationalistically oriented fictions of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, but also indirectly fed on earlier surrealist impulses imbibed by Negritude poets such as Leopold Sedar Senghor (Cooper, 2004). Today postcolonial African writers employ magical realism in their literary works as an effective alternative to the realist mode used in the past. It serves to capture what may seem unbelievable to western sensibilities but real to indigenous understanding as well as open the way to the world of limitless possibilities. In fact, in postcolonial Africa, the magnitude of vices like corruption, deposition, dictatorship, and electoral frauds, defies human imagination; even the sacredness of life is violated by the carnage that is the result of the gratuitous violence that characterizes socio-political relations in postcolonial Africa.

In an interview, the veteran postcolonial African theorist and critic Ngugi wa Thiongo observes that the socio-political situation in Africa has reached a point where the novelist's imagination must go beyond realism if he/she is to adequately represent it. He suggests that one possible and adequate way of depicting the present predicament of Africa is through the fable, the fantastical. Ngugi's call for the use of what is referred to as magical realism in the depiction of the current African situation in literature, suggests that this mode is employed out of necessity, thereby confirming the incommensurable role of literature and writers in the socio-political life of Africans. Indeed, Ngugi's response echoes Salman Rushdie's comment on the situation in his native country thus: "You must use the language in a manner which permits god to exist- the divine to be as real as the divan I am sitting on. Realism can no longer express or account for the absurd reality of the world we live in – a world which has the capability of destroying itself at any moment" (qtd in Faris, 2004:88). Here Rushdie describes magical realism as a special style he needs for the portrayal of the contemporary situation in India.

### Satirical Magical Realism in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*

Set in an imaginary African country of Aburiria, *Wizard of the Crow* opens with rumours about the unexplained illness of the Ruler. Because the Ruler's illness cannot be scientifically diagnosed, Aburirians developed extraordinary theories about its causes. Amongst these theories, five have been on the lips of Aburirian citizens: the first theory blames the Ruler's illness on the anger he developed after being denied an interview by the *Global Network News* during a visit in New York; the second theory claims the illness was a curse from the cry of a wronged he-goat; the third blames it on the Ruler's long rule; the fourth traces it to the Ruler's legal wife, Rachael's refusal to shed tears after her fall from grace; and the fifth believes that the illness is the sole work of the daemons that the Ruler had housed in a special chamber in the State House, who had now turned their backs on him and withdrew their protective services. (3-10) The Ruler's illness and Aburirians' theories about it are reflective of fables which are defined as stories with fantastic events and creatures having allegorical meaning. The Ruler's absolute power depends on sycophants like Sikiokuu, Machokali, and Big Ben, who have gone as far as surgically enlarging their ears, eyes, and tongue, respectively, in order to be his most loyal spies and spokespersons, in order to gain his love.

In Aburiria nepotism and corruption are the basic actions of the state, the main interest of the elite who frequent the Ruler is self-preservation, and they know what to do to remain in the good book of the dictator whose only criterion for cabinet appointments is the candidate's loyalty to him. Thus, when the Ruler learns that Machokali, the sycophant-in-chief, has gone to England to surgically remove his eyes to serve him better, he gives him the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This is indeed a satire on African leaders who surround themselves with sycophants who weave self-seeking flatteries that the leaders often seem to rely on. The free republic of Aburiria is neither free nor a republic and its very name is an irony. The Ruler announces a new kind of democracy in which he is the head of every party. Crooks are appointed as upholders of the law and their criminality praised as a virtue. One is exposed to characters like Machokali who went to a London hospital:

Not because he was ill but because he wanted to have his eyes enlarged, to make them ferociously sharp... so that they would be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far their hiding places. Enlarged the size of electric bulbs his eyes were now the most prominent feature of his face, dwarfing his nose, cheeks and forehead. The Ruler so touched by his devotion and public expression of loyalty that even before the MP returned home from England the Ruler had given him the Ministry of Foreign Affairs... ... so that Machokali would be his representative eye wherever, in whatever corner of the globe lay the Ruler's interest...(12-13).

What makes Ngugi's magical realism unique is the fairy-like narration of events. The once-upon-a-time narrative technique allows for satire and humour as well as a depiction of the horror and injustice of life under the Ruler. Indeed, this is what drives all the characters and their actions in the novel. The Ruler's positive response vis-a-vis Machokali's act of devotion spurs so many body modifications by other sycophants. Thus, in the Ruler's entourage, another back-bencher MP decides to follow the footsteps of Machokali. Nothing can stop this particular cabinet member, for he goes as far as secretly selling his father's plot and borrowing money to buy a ticket to France in order to serve the Ruler:

He did not have much money, so he secretly sold his father's plot and borrowed the rest to buy himself a flight to France and a hospital bed in Paris, where he had his ears enlarged so that, as he also put it his press statement, he would be able to hear better and therefore be privy to the most private of conversations between husband and wife, children and their parents, students and teachers... All in service of the Ruler. His ears were large than a rabbit's and always primed to detect danger at any time from any direction (14).

When Sikiokuu comes back with his new look, the Ruler is pleased with what he sees and decides to upgrade the former's position in the cabinet. Obviously these extreme cases of loyalty are found in postcolonial African countries for example in Togo, Colonel Assila of the Togolese Armed Forces offered to sacrifice himself in order to persuade General Eyadema to stay in power. Like other postcolonial dictators, the Ruler of Aburiria adores flattery, praises, and glorification. The Sikiokuus of postcolonial African countries know how to play this game well. In order to continue to enjoy the dictator's favours, these shameless sycophants' quotidian preoccupation is how to please the dictators and rally the people behind them in order to give the impression that the dictators are loved. They make sure that all the actions of the dictators are disseminated to the citizens. In Aburiria, any action of the Ruler is in the news. "His every moment-eating, shitting, sneezing, or blowing his nose is captured on camera. Even his yawns were news because, whether triggered by boredom, fatigue, or thirst, they were often followed by some nation drama. ...." (3). In Aburiria the ridiculous does not kill, we learn that an MP, Benjamin Mambo has been inspired by the fortune of Machokali and Sikiokuu that he had his tongue elongated so he can effectively echo the Ruler's commands to soldiers in the country and threats to his enemies before they reach the Aburirian borders. This earned him the Information Minister portfolio; but he later learned at his own expense that he also needed to enlarge his mouth to retain the ability to speak.

The bodily changes of these three sycophants are also followed by name changes. Marcus became Machokali, Silver became Sikiokuu, and Mambo became Big Ben; the latter is believed to have been inspired by the clock at the British Parliament. Their extraordinarily distorted bodies make them look more like cartoonish characters than humans; this creates a comic atmosphere throughout the novel. This is, no doubt, what the exaggerated depictions of the physical appearance of characters aim at. Ngugi is satirical magical realism at its finest. At the heart of satirical magical realism is mockery for mockery sake. Benjamin Mambo equally toed the footsteps of Machokali and Sikiokuu. As a young man, Mambo had failed to get into the army because he was smallish, the only avenue that will earn him the minister of defence was elongating his tongue: "He chose to have his tongue elongated so that in echoing the Ruler's command his words would reach every soldier in the country...and the tongue, like a dog's now hung out way beyond his lips rendering speech impossible" (14-15). These body modifications symbolises the distortion of human values. The ascription of these grotesque and surrealistic features serves stylistic and didactic function. These characters' realities exist only in the limit of the reality of the narrative. This is an express instance of the postmodern metaphor and a direct denial of verisimilitude.

Ngugi's distinctive depiction of The Ruler and his devotees makes his critique against them very powerful; by demoting them to the cartoonish characters, he shows how worthless they are such as the episode where the Ruler is diagnosed with Self-Induced Expansion (SIE). "It seems that the Ruler's body had started puffing up like a balloon, his whole body becoming more and more inflated, without losing the proportion of parts" (469). This ultimately leads to the rumours that the Ruler was pregnant. By ridiculing the Ruler, he is demystified and left at the mercy of the world. Ngugi's satire and humour make his use of magic ironic. He seems to distance himself from the supernatural appropriations and views of his people as ridiculous. In other words, Ngugi incorporates ironic distance, Brenda Cooper's most important feature of magical realism. This is demonstrated in Kamiti's admission to Nyawira that he and his childhood friends used to test the superstitious beliefs of his people and make fun of them:

When we were children we used to play witchcraft. We would stick a wooden spike through a bundle of leaves, a dead frog or lizard, and one or two Sodom apples and then plant the spike hi a path. From a safe distance we kept an eye on it, and what excited us most was to see



adults, grown men and women, avoiding any contact with the bundle. Some would even take a step, or two back, then give it a wide berth. Nobody dared touch it; there were times when the bundle remained in place, Lord knows, for days. (84)

In the opening pages, one is exposed to the insatiability of African leaders. They cling to power as if it were their birthright. "He sat on the throne so long that even he could not remember when his reign began. His rule had no beginning and no end... children had been born and had given birth to others and those others to other and so on, and his rule had survived all the generation" (5).

Here Ngugi distorts time, which is one of the major characteristics of magical realism. This is done to show that African leaders see leadership as a birthright. They impose themselves on the masses. They become life presidents and dictators. This is a very sad development. One can imagine a rule that has no beginning and no end. Again, Ngugi defies time by telling the reader that the date of the Ruler's birthday was a subject of a heated debate in parliament. "The date of his birth and the manner of its celebration had been subject of a heated debate in the parliament that went on for seven months, seven days, seven hours and seven minutes..." (12).

One can imagine debating a birthday date and celebration for seven months. Are there no better things to talk about, such as the level of poverty in Aburiria? Devoting so much time to a birthday date and celebration is unpatriotic. Today in Africa the legislative houses devote so much time in looking into things that will be of no benefit to the masses. They sit for hours discussing irrelevant matters. The reader is opened to the paragraph where the Ruler is presented with a special birthday cake which the entire country had made:

That particular year the stadium was almost full because the curiosity of the citizens had been aroused by a special announcement, repeated over and over in the media, that there would be a special birthday cake, which the entire country had made for the Ruler and which he might make multiply and feed the multitude the way Jesus Christ once did with just five loaves and two fishes. The prospects of cakes for the multitude may explain the more than usual presence of victims of kwashiorkor (12).

It is said that individual can cook for a community but a community cannot cook for an individual. The national presentation of the cake to the Ruler is an interesting metaphor for what the Nigerian musical maestro, Fela Kuti had called suffering and smiling – a situation where the suppressed people make pretensions about being happy. The cake incident brings to light the fact that the citizens are hungry and poor. No wonder the glaring image of "victims of kwashiorkor". In the pages that follow, an amazing project is announced in the occasion of the Ruler's birthday. Aburiria is launching the "Heaven Scrape program" or "marching to heaven" as it is informally called, a construction project based on the biblical towers of Babel. The aim is to reach heavens and allow the Ruler converse directly with God:

The whole country, the minister of foreign affairs was saying that the entire Aburirian populace, had decided unanimously to erect a building such as had never been attempted in the history except once by the children of Israel, and even they had failed miserably to complete the house of Babel. Aburiria would now do what the Israelites could not do: raise a building to the very gates of heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning and good evening or simply how was your day today, God? (6).

One begins to wonder how the Ruler will ascend such a large tower. Fortunately, a sycophantic minister has a solution. Aburiria will build a personal spaceship so that the Ruler can reach the heavenly gates:

He suggested that another committee under his chairmanship be set up to explore the possibilities for the construction of a space luxury liner called the Ruler's Angel... something

simpler bigger than the one the Americans had once launched to Mars, to be called Star Rover or simply Rock Rover in Heaven. Armed with personal spaceship, the only leader in the whole world to possess one, Ruler would make pleasure trips wherever and whenever he fancied, hopping from planet to planet... (18-19).

The whole political structure in Aburiria is hinged on lies, and whoever gives a version contradictory to those lies is accused of treason. This is why it is not surprising that the Ruler's most hated prisoners are journalists, historians, and professors. He refers to them as terrorists and rumour mongers. Obviously, one can relate this with almost all the African countries. The Ruler is a demagogue, who uses emotionally charged language to manipulate and control his people in order to win their sympathy and turn them against those who dare tell the truth. Thus, when the Ruler finally comes to the podium to grant parole to political prisoners to citizens of Aburiria, who proposed the Marching to Heaven, the Aburirian Tower of Babel as birthday gift, he gets another chance to denigrate journalists and professors among them:

...This terrorist of intellect has spent ten years in jail, said the Ruler, but because of this historic occasion, I have let him out early. But Professor Materu would not be allowed to grow his beard a length more than half an inch, and if he transgressed, he would be re-imprisoned... All the other dissidents had to swear that never again would they collect and pass on rumours as history, literature, or journalism.... (20)

Here fiction seems to imitate life because Ngugi himself was imprisoned by the very government. Many commentators point at this as the target of the satire in *Wizard of the Crow*. In 1977, during the time Arap Moi was serving as Kenyan's vice-president, he ordered the imprisonment of Ngugi for writing a play in his native language Gikuyu. *Ngaahika Ndeda*, later translated as *I Will Marry When I Want*, which was considered too critical of neocolonial Kenya, and therefore too rabble rousing for the masses it was written for. After his one - year imprisonment without trial, he lost his professorship at Nairobi University. So, professor Materu may be Ngugi, which also confirms the parallel between Aburiria and Kenya under Arap Moi. The fact that postcolonial African writers discuss this theme in many of their artistic work is proof that it is widespread across the continent. In Aburiria, fantasies and realities are so indistinguishable that their depiction requires a concentrated dose of satire as Ngugi does in this novel.

Those half-dozen satirical story links to meet merge and intertwine and one comic misadventure follows another. Nyawira becomes Aburiria's most wanted criminal; Kaniuru is promoted for his expertise in stealing from the state; Tajirika takes a military base hostage 144 with a bucket of hit; and the wizard of the crow travels to America, to treat a strange illness that befalls the Ruler and becomes the key to all their futures. The supernatural elements which Ngugi uses in *Wizard of the Crow* are a blend of fantasy and magical realism. Kamiti's magic is sorcery-like, the type we might find in a fantasy novel, with regimented rules and limitations, but he lives in a magic-realist world, with neither rhyme nor reason to its supernatural. Though Kamiti is only masquerading as a wizard, he is gifted with a divine ability to smell a person's true character. He says "there are times when the foul and fresh appear to struggle for the right of passage into my nostrils, like evil and good spirits fighting for the dominations of soul" (59). The novel contains ingredients which makes the experience of reading it a kind of phantasmagoric dream. The *Wizard of the Crow* reminds us that magical realism is not just a story telling device but a tool of oppression. Ngugi mocks national leadership in Africa and elsewhere through manipulations of the realistic mode, which has also been very effective in representing political issues in Africa.

What makes magical realism so successful is that its closeness to reality makes it easy to decode. Ngugi's use of the folkloric traditions of the Gikuyu people is the major reason for the novel's

success. The fables narrated in a series of stories provide a setting that reflects the shocking events and actions of the characters of the novel. In the opening of the novel, Ngugi introduces his audience to a fabulous story about the solitary confinement of Rachael, the once beloved wife of the Ruler. The story goes that on one special evening, the Mighty Ruler of Aburiria and his wife Rachael has a supper at the State House. Rachael thinks that it was an opportunity to call the father of the nation on what she considers to be his incestuous behaviour. She goes on to confront the Ruler about his sexual relations with school girls, he stops eating and turns to her to make sure she really said what he has heard, he makes it clear to Rachael that the unfinished meal would be their last supper together. His intoxication of power is buttressed when he built her a house on a seven acre plot that he surrounded with a stone wall and an electric fence, in which he stops the time.

All the clocks in the house were frozen at the second, minutes, and the hour that she has raised the question of school girls; the calendars pointed to the day and the year. The clocks tick-tocked, but their hands did not move. The mechanical calendar always flipped to the same date. The food provided was the same as at the last supper, the 146 clothes the same as she had worn that night. The beddings and curtains were identical to those where she once lived. The television and radio kept repeating programs that were on during the last supper. Everything in the new mansion reproduced the exact same moment (8). A recorder was programmed to play only one hymn: Our Lord will come back one day He will take us to his home above I will then know how much he love me Whenever he comes back. And when he come back you the wicked will be left behind Moaning your wicked deeds whenever our Lord comes back (8). According to the narrator, Rachael was to remain inside the guarded mansion until —she has shed all the tears for all the tomorrows of all the children she had accused him of abusing, and then the Ruler would take her back to restart life at the exact moment she has fallen from grace (8). The Ruler is thus elevated above the World and is now in charge of it. There is a sort of deification of the Ruler who has tamed time so he can control all the events. Once again, Ngugi creates a fairy tale atmosphere in order to accommodate the Ruler's hubris.

In line with postmodernism, critics have found a parallel between this scene and scenes in well-known texts. For instance, Gikandi traces it to the bible; he argues that the scene comes 147 from the Bible. In these texts, the leader provides his wife with a last supper and leaves her like her Biblical names sake, Rachael, weeping for children in the wilderness (164). Fables drawn on the rich African oral tradition, particularly the Gikuyu folklore make it possible for Ngugi to easily juxtapose realism, satire and magic in order to offer an insight into African politics. The hero of the novel, Kamiti is an intellectual with hidden spiritual powers, which he inherited from his grandfather. Even though reluctant at the beginning, he becomes a wizard who uses mirrors to cure Aburirian politicians from their fantastic ailments such as —white achel.

The reader's first encounter with him was when he was seen lying on a garbage of heap, having an out-of-experience as a bird. He was mistaken for a corpse by the trash collectors but they were shocked when the corpse began to move. He was tired, hungry and thirsty and felt beaten down by the sun, he wanted to climb to the top, when he felt very weak in the knees and collapsed at the foot of mountain of garbage. He could not tell whether he was in a temporary coma or a deep sleep, but when a slight breeze blew it lifted him out of himself to the sky, where he now floated. He could still see his body lying on the ground and the mountain of garbage where children and dogs fought over signs of meat and white bones .... I am human, I am a human being, a soul and not a piece of garbage, no matter how poor and ragged I look, and I deserve respect, he heard himself say time and again as he descended to and repossessed his body (38–40).

This is a reverberation of the inequalities that exist in the Aburirian society. This is also brought to light during his flight over Aburiria. He observes that in Eldares, every town he traverses, —people were hungry, thirsty and in rags. —Shacks stood side by side with mansions of tile, stone, glass and concrete. He also realizes that he is not alone in his conditions of poverty, and wishes he could remain —a bird in order to escape suffering that characterizes human society (39). From this we infer that these supernatural moments are bases that enable these heroes to clearly see what is going on in their respective societies. Yes the writer needs to exceed realism to represent the absurd realities of his country. This flight marks the beginning of Kamiti's awareness of his responsibility vis-à-vis social and political reformation of his country. He obviously was not happy with what he saw and felt that something needed to be done. He (Kamiti) is of the view that the first steps towards a real reformation must be the healing of the souls, for damaged souls produced damaged politicians and businessmen visit his shrine for divination and cure of unusual diseases. Aburirians are very superstitious and they are convinced about the wizard's healing power. Soon after AG's visit to the wizard's shrine, he is promoted to the highest rank and he believes he owes this promotion to the wizard, who has destroyed his enemies.

Thus: —What caused this sudden change in my career? AG would ask his listeners, only to answer the question himself, —the wizard of the crow. Kamiti is also taken to New York to cure the Ruler's bizarre illness known as self-induced expansion (SIE), he leaves his body behind, becomes a bird and undertakes a spiritual voyage back in time in search of black power: Go back in time. Arise and go to the crossroads, all the market places and temple sites, all the dwelling places of black people the world over, and find out the sources of their power. There you will find the cure for SIE ... He woke up in flight laughing, recalling his travels from the pyramids of Egypt to the plains of the Serengeti and great Zimbabwe, Benin to Bahia and on through the Caribbean to the skyscrapers of New York alighting everywhere to glean wisdom (494). This passage is a reminder that the traditional African society believes in witchcraft. The Wizard of the Crow is infused with the supernatural, and this is what places the novel within the magic realist tradition as many reviewers and critics have suggested. One of such reviewers, Hazel Rochman writes: Magical realism drives this Mammoth novel set in the imaginary African country of Aburiria, and exiled Kenyan writer Wathiongo roots the wild fantasy in the brutal horror of contemporary politics. His ridicule of the powerful knows no bounds as the novel chronicles greed and corruption in Aburiria and in the West, including the Global Bank's Funding of the Aburirian ruler's marching to heaven tower of Babel.

But even more than the crazy plot of coup, countercoup, flattery and betrayal, what holds the reader here is the intimate story of one couple. Quiet Secretary Nyawiram secret leader of the people's resistance movement, persuades her intellectual lover, Kamiti, to give up his search for himself in the wild, and they embark on a plan to change the world, with Kamithi disguised as a sorcerer set off by the global farce, this unforgettable love story reveals the magic power of the ordinary in people and in politics (booklist). Just like Okri, Ngugi has resisted this label. As Simon Gikandi notes in his review of the novel: Ngugi has seemed irritated by suggestions that his works is an African version of the genre of Magical realism associated with Latin American writers of the boom generation. He has reacted to such claims by reminding his interlocutors that his narrative models are drawn from Gikiyu folklore, not —magical realism (160).

Thus, Ngugi joins other postcolonial African writers who reject such comparisons. For instance, Ben Okri and Zakes Mela have made it clear that the presence of the supernatural in their novels has everything to do with the cultures in which they write. These cultures, they argue, view the supernatural as normal. Like these two writers, Ngugi may not have intended to write a magic realist novel; however, his narrative style possesses all the characteristics of a style that has already earned



its name and this is not easy to ignore. Ngugi's narrative may have very well drawn from Gikuyu folklore; but it cannot escape the label of magical realism, for all the features in this narrative point to this mode. No wonder why Phyllis Taoua is of the view that Ngugi's use of magical realism —helps enliven the narrative's satirical humour in the novel (218). From a closer look Ngugi seems to reject the tendency of critics to overlook the cultural bases of individual texts that are labelled magic realist texts for him this comparison suggests imitation, which perpetuates the notion that African cultures have nothing authentic to offer to the world.

### Conclusion

It is pertinent to know that a writer can go beyond imagination; he could delve into the realm of fantasy or even the supernatural to make his point clear and his criticisms biting. Imagination is not the limit, because we actually live in a world that anything is capable of happening. Therefore, a writer should be able to exceed reality in order to portray these realities. Ngugi delved into magical realism in order to lay bare leadership irregularities in Kenya. He achieved this by distorting realism; he equally exceeded the limits of conventional characters. Most of his characters were given animal attributes; some of the events in the novel were exaggerated. Ngugi handled all these like it was the normal thing; he didn't bother to make explanations. For example there was a scene where Kamithi left his body and took the form of a bird. Now, this is a writer exceeding imagination and delving into the supernatural realm in order to buttress the political irregularities prevalent in his country.

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