



Aphoristic Storytelling and Magical Realism as Postcolonial Strategy in Ben OKRI'S Selected Novels

¹P. Ruby & ²Dr. J. Uma Samundeeswari

¹Full -Time Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English

A.V.V.M Sri Pushpam College (A), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Poondi, Thanjavur

²Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English

A.V.V.M Sri Pushpam College (A), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Poondi, Thanjavur



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Abstract

This paper examines how aphoristic creativity and magical realism work as Postcolonial strategies in Ben Okri's select novels. Ben Okri is an African writer and political critic of Africa. In his selected works, rich aphorisms of life, famine, agony, destiny, politics and spirituality are articulated through a postcolonial lens. These works also undertake an exploration of aphoristic storytelling and magical realism, decolonize African society, and redefine postcolonial subjectivity. Fusion of Aphoristic storytelling and magical realism is a new find in postcolonial strategy. African literature often examines the tension between observable socio-political realities and unseen metaphysical forces. Ultimately, the study argues that aphoristic storytelling and magical realism operate as complementary postcolonial strategies that reimagine history, reclaim cultural voice, and articulate alternative futures for societies emerging from colonial domination. Traditional beliefs clash with modern political systems and urban life, highlighting cultural tension in a changing society.

Keywords: Ben Okri, Aphoristic creativity, Famine, metaphysical, Postcolonial strategy.

Introduction

Ben Okri constructs a narrative strategy grounded in oral tradition and aesthetics, in which the material and spiritual world coexist, challenging dominant metaphysical assumptions in Africa. Magical realism function as a form of resistance to colonial rationalism while aphoristic creativity operates as a philosophical strategy for survival in Africa. Okri presents mythic cycles of birth, death and rebirth through an Abiku's life in an unnamed African village. He employs nonlinear storytelling techniques in his selected plays.

African literature frequently employs innovative narrative strategies to contest colonial histories and representations. Among contemporary African writers, Ben Okri occupies a unique position due to his fusion of philosophical reflection, mythic consciousness, and political criticism. His novels resist linear realism and instead construct a narrative mode rooted in African oral traditions and spiritual cosmologies. Central to this mode are aphoristic storytelling and magical realism, which together function as powerful postcolonial strategies.



It employs aphorism and magical realism not merely as stylistic devices but as ideological tools to interrogate colonial legacies, destabilize Eurocentric rationalism, and articulate postcolonial identity. Through close textual analysis of *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment*, *Infinite Riches*, and *Astonishing the Gods*, the study demonstrates Okri's narrative strategies, challenges dominant epistemologies, and reclaims suppressed cultural knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in postcolonial theory, particularly concepts of hybridity, resistance, and epistemic decolonization articulated by scholars such as Homi Bhabha. Magical realism, traditionally associated with Latin American literature, is recontextualized here within African cosmology, where the supernatural is integral to lived reality rather than an exotic intrusion. Aphoristic storytelling is approached as an extension of African oral traditions, functioning as a vehicle for communal wisdom, ethical reflection, and cultural continuity. In Okri's work, aphorisms operate as moments of philosophical condensation that interrupt narrative flow and invite contemplative engagement.

"And to prove to you that we are not empty words bring your children to us. We are giving away free milk! Yes! Free milk from us! Courtesy of our great party!" (*The Famished Road* 145)

It demonstrates politicians fight for power, using violence, manipulation, false promises and bribery. The blend of Yoruba mythology with modern political reality shows Nigeria's struggle after independence.

Aphoristic Storytelling in Okri's Fiction

The use of aphorisms displays existence, spirituality, socio political reality and human condition of Africans. It bridges the African oral tradition with multiple reality of modern fiction.

"The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry" (*The Famished Road* 3)

The above aphorisms offer profound insight, encapsulating in a few words the intense struggles of colonized people.

"Life is full of riddles that only the dead can answer" (*The Famished Road* 48)

"Trouble always happens after celebration. Trouble is coming to our area" (*The Famished Road* 186)

'Yes, because the prophets's people are the dead. Heaven means different things to different people. They wanted to live, to be more alive. They wanted to know the essence of pain, they wanted to suffer, to feel, to love, to hate, to be greater than hate, and to be imperfect in order to always have something to strive towards, which is beauty. They wanted also to know wonder and to live miracles. Death is too perfect.' (*The Famished Road* 378), This aphorism illustrates freedom is different to every people. The perfection in death shows in difficulties finding survival of life in postcolonial African society.

These aphorisms serve multiple functions such as universalize local experiences, resist colonial rationality, and foreground an alternative philosophical worldview rooted in spirituality and intuition. The voice of aphorism strengthens magical realism. Political critic of corruption, oppression, and struggle. In *The Famished Road* trilogy, the narrator Azaro frequently articulates insights such as the fluidity of reality, the cyclical nature of suffering, and the resilience of the human spirit. Ben Okri's novels are the collection of aphorisms that explore themes of life, identity, philosophical ideas, principles, perspectives and spirituality. The blend of real social issues, poverty and politics exposes the purpose of postcolonialism.

Magical Realism as Postcolonial Resistance

Magical realism in Okri's novels is inseparable from African literature. African literature frequently employs innovative narrative strategies to contest colonial histories and representations. Among contemporary African writers, Ben Okri occupies a unique position due to his fusion of philosophical reflection, mythic consciousness, and political critic.



His novels resist linear realism and instead construct a narrative mode rooted in African oral traditions and spiritual cosmologies.

“This chair I am sitting on has been talking to me, releasing its stories. It used to be an Englishman who died in this country. He died of malaria. He had a child by one of our women and he disowned the poor boy. His wife did not enjoy sex. The chair then travelled from the expatriate quarters of the city and passed through two families and was nearly burned when a house caught fire. Then it was stolen, then sold, and I don’t know how it got here” (*Songs of Enchantment* 222)

‘If a spirit calls you,’ Mum said, ‘don’t go, you hear? Think of us. Think of your father who suffers every day to feed us. And think of me who carried you in my womb for more than nine months and who walks all the streets because of you.’ (*The Famished Road* 352),

Abiku, a character from *The Famished Road* trilogy relies on dream and visions to suggest the mystery of life and the limits of human knowledge of the world that contains. Central to this mode are aphoristic storytelling and magical realism, which together function as powerful postcolonial strategies. This paper explores how Okri employs aphorism and magical realism not merely as stylistic devices but as ideological tools to interrogate colonial legacies, destabilize Eurocentric rationalism, and articulate identity. Through close textual analysis of *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment*, *Infinite Riches*, and *Astonishing the Gods*, the study demonstrates how Okri’s narrative strategies challenge dominant epistemologies and reclaim suppressed cultural knowledge.

Interplay of Aphorism and Magical Realism

Aphorisms provide philosophical grounding for the magical events, framing them as sources of wisdom. The interplay of aphorism adds the understanding of life among the negro people. The Mum of Azaro tells stories to her son ‘About rain and the rain god.’ (*The Famished Road* 361) and the poverty and famish comprehend through, ‘When I got home Mum was at the door, bailing water out of the room with a plastic

bowl. All the holes were leaking like open taps. The bed was thoroughly wet, the clothes dripped. There were pots and buckets everywhere’. (*The Famished Road* 361)

“I had this dream. A white man turned into a tortoise and asked me to give him my land. He had a gun. I fought him, and he shot me through the head.” (*Infinite Riches* 285)

‘It reminds me that whatever we sit on will one day make us fall.’ (*The Famished Road* 372), this philosophical phrase exposing the decolonisation of British empire.

Colonial Hybridity, a movement of black from Africa to Europe, cross cultural exchange and idea of exchange is one of the concepts in postcolonialism.

Conclusion

Ben Okri’s use of aphoristic storytelling and magical realism constitutes a postcolonial strategy to rethinking or deeper interpretation. Postcolonialism witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world. By blending philosophical reflection with mythic imagination, Okri offers an alternative literary vision that foregrounds spiritual consciousness, cultural hybridity, and ethical inquiry. It demonstrates the process of explication that hope and resistance among the people of postcolonial society remain possible even amid suffering and that governance in Africa is ongoing like *The Famished Road* with extreme hunger, homelessness, and exploitation, notably among underprivileged groups.

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