

Narration and Perspective in Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*

Andrew Bula

Centre for Foundation & Interdisciplinary Studies, Baze University, Abuja, Nigeria

E-mail: andrew.bula@bazeuniversity.edu.ng

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Abstract

Critical forays into Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* have basically tended to dwell on the political side of the text, no doubt because it is predominantly informed by politics; hence, it is a personal account with a heavy dose of political issues resulting in war and violence. But the technicality of narration of the memoir and its perspective, no less worthy of critical engagements, have hardly received sustained criticism. This paper occupies that critical opening. It is made out that the pattern of narration of the account, and the perspective from which the narrative is laid out exist side by side in the text, and it is these that together contribute to the authenticity of the art of the memoir and the individuality of the same. Julia Kristeva's notion of the figure of "double destinations" in her theory of intertextuality is adopted in this reading to aid comprehension of these two intertwining components, narration and perspective, which together form the basis of the art and individuality of the memoir.

Keywords: Authenticity, Double Destinations, Intertextuality, Individuality, Narration, Perspective

Introduction

Textual critiques of Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* have chiefly preoccupied themselves with the theme of politics culminating in war and violence. Often, the trend of criticism of the text has generally taken the form of debating whether or not history has been accurately interpreted or what mindset Achebe has in his memoir, et cetera. For instance, in an article which takes up the question of examining the memoir in order to ascertain Achebe's idea of nationalism, Ekhatior (2015) contends that "memories of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war disenchant the spirit of nationalism in Nigerians" (p. 13); but that "Achebe sends a warning and a call for peace, to the ethnic supremacists, Biafra nostalgists, Igbo everyone-hates-us-ists, Yoruba justificationists, tribal chauvinists, Northern oligarchists etc, in Nigeria" (p. 15). In similar fashion, a study by Nwosu (2016) opens a probe into the text in order to "assess, to what extent the book serves as a worthy medium through which Achebe looks back at his life and meditates on the goings-on in his country especially at the twilight of his life" (p. 50). In the collaborative work of Unaegbu and Ogbonne (2017), the matter under scrutiny is one of interrogating, with the help of Emile Durkheim's theory of Social Catharsis, the nature of the unconscious and subconscious of Achebe's intentions in his war account with a view to uncovering whether the writer experienced social catharsis in the process of writing the memoir, and the outward manner this catharsis took with regards to the initial reception of the work. Thus, Unaegbu and Ogbonne (2017) make the case that based on the evidence of words taken from *There Was a Country*, Achebe has "healthy but

existing pent-up emotions that yearn for social catharsis” (p. 368) and that “shortly after publishing the book in 2012, the second stage of emotional communion began externally aside the internal emotional communal experiences of putting the names of people of social influence, whose actions affected the society, in the book” (p. 368). As they further note, “Achebe got intense unfavourable reviews from some scholars and favourable reviews from mainly Igbo intellectuals, some of whom connected to the social catharsis in 2012” (p. 368).

Chinedu (2018), in his own paper, explores trends of Achebe’s induction into the way of life of his Igbo people, his creative thinking, and his metaphorical use of the masquerade in *There Was a Country*. The paper argues that if Achebe views artworks as masquerades, it means then that his memoir must be taken as the Ijele or masquerade. Hence, it casts about to isolate the Ijele qualities in *There Was a Country*. Correspondingly, in a review work by Awofeso (2015), it is clear that the reviewer admires the way in which Achebe interprets history, saying that, “With *There Was a Country*, I felt like a teenager seated at the feet of an elder, who painfully recollects how the community’s sacred shrine was wrecked by those who should have known better, while he watched, helplessly, as the sacrilege lasted” (n. p) and that “It’s impossible not to feel Achebe’s grief...owing to his knowledge of the millions of avoidable deaths...and the destruction of many towns and cities across the short-lived Biafra, for which he served as roving ambassador; plus he doesn’t hide the fact that he wished that the battle for the birth of Biafra had succeeded, freeing the Igbos”(n. p). In fact, he concludes the review, saying: “*There Was A Country* is profound tribute to a glorious past, one that Nigeria may never witness again, a heartfelt cry to compatriots to wise up and reclaim their dignity from a leadership that appears to forever revel in its own deceit and delusion” (n. p).

These kinds of criticism abound so much so that attention is hardly paid to a sustained examination of the technique of narration of the memoir and its perspective. In this paper, therefore, the line of inquiry is how the narrative design of the text and its perspective work to lend genuineness to the art of the memoir and its distinctiveness. In a bid to realize this aspiration, a mythological image of the figure of “double destinations” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 43) will be utilized in this study, which entails something that can be “doubly interpreted or have double destinations” (p. 43). This mythological image, derived from Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, is deployed in this reading in an effort to facilitate cognition of the investigation of these two interwoven elements, narration and perspective, within the text of the memoir.

2. The Narration of the Memoir

The mode in which Achebe narrates his personal history is conventional in the sense that the account has a beginning, middle, and an end. In other words, the narrative design does not experiment with that order, which is to say that it does not begin, say, from the end as Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, in which the novel opens with a concluding incident and then the story is reeled back to explain prior sequences that lead up to it. Nor is a memoir, by and large, rarely so, although there could be different sorts of experimentations brought to bear on its form. Achebe for one does not refrain from experimenting with the general format of narration of *There Was a Country*, something which will be returned to in due course.

In accounting for the narration of the memoir, there is yet the apparent fact of the exploitation of literary language to tell a tale in the text. As in his entire oeuvre, use of the English language by Achebe (2012) in his personal account is laced with simplicity, grandeur, and pleasure that are especially unique to him. It is also very charming and compelling. See, for instance, this portion of it:

On November 16, 1930, in Nnobi, near my hometown of Ogidi, providence ushered me into a world at a cultural crossroads. By then, a long-standing clash of Western and African civilizations had generated deep conversations and struggles between their respective languages, religions, and cultures. Crossroads possess a certain dangerous potency. Anyone born there must wrestle with their multiheaded spirits and return to his or her people with the boon of prophetic vision, or accept, as I have, life’s interminable mysteries. My initiation into the complicated world of Ndi Igbo was at the hands of my mother and my older sister, Zinobia, who furnished me with a number of wonderful stories from our ancient Igbo tradition. The tales were steeped in intrigue, spiced with oral acrobatics and songs, but always resolute in their moral message. My favourite stories starred the tortoise *mbe*, and celebrated his mischievous escapades. As a child, sitting quietly, mesmerized, story time took on a whole new world of meaning and importance. I realize, reminiscing about these events, that it is little wonder I decided to become a storyteller. (pp. 8-9)

Reading this passage, it is as if one is immersed in a movie. In other words, the passage is absorbing as well as compelling, because of the enormous pleasure it offers. In fact, in much of the reminiscences, Achebe (2012) provides these kinds of text for digest. One more illustration will suffice:

When a number of us decided to pick up the pen and make writing a career there was no African literature as we know it today. There were of course our great oral tradition—the epics of the Malinke, the Bamana, and the Fulani—the narratives of Olaudah Equiano, works by D. O. Fagunwa and Muhammadu Bello, and novels by Pita Nwana, Amos Tutuola, and Cyprian Ekwensi. Across the African continent, literary aficionados could savor the works of Egyptian, Nubian, and Carthaginian antiquity; Amharic and Tigrigna writings from Ethiopia and Eritrea; and the magnificent poetry and creation myths of Somalia. There was more—the breathtakingly beautiful Swahili poetry of East and Central Africa, and the chronicles, legends, and fables of the Ashanti, Dogon, Hutu, Kalanga, Mandingo, Ndebele, Ovambo, Shona, Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Tutsi, Venda, Wolof, Xhosa, and Zulu. ... Still, the numbers were not sufficient. And so I had no idea when I was writing *Things Fall Apart* whether it would

even be accepted or published. All of this was new—there was nothing by which I could gauge how it was going to be received. (p. 53)

Apart from the obvious pleasure which this passage also provides, there is yet a sense of pride about it that one feels; that is, reading the passage, one feels proud of one's African heritage, of being an African, and of being Achebe's kin. This quality is also present in the excerpt that precedes this one. Of course, it is occasioned by Achebe's linguistic deftness.

By the same token, the narration of the memoir is artful. By this notion, it is meant that language use in *There Was a Country* is literary. This, no doubt, underscores Foucault's brilliant perspective on the language of literature which he holds is "a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is "literary"" (as cited in Akwanya, 2011). This specificity of the language of literature must mean that, to co-opt a phrasing by Amechi N. Akwanya (2015), "it is not any language at all ... that is in question" (p. 240). But what, it must be asked, is the language of literature or literary language? Again, Akwanya provides a fine elucidation: "Literary language is therefore not a matter of register or effects. It is a poetic and is capable of speaking not by means of what it says alone but also by the rhythm and the cadence native to or supported by that language" (p. 239). The entailment of this is that literary language is certainly not ordinary and its rhythm and tempo is something intrinsic to it. In fact, in another study, "Art-Being and *Úrù*: Use-Value is Everything; or is it?" Akwanya (2011) writes thus of literary language:

This language, as both Formalism and Heidegger recognize is dissimilar to the language of everyday discourse. Both seem to agree that this language is the output of *poiesis*. There is suggestion, however, in Foucault that this language is found, not made... In this case, language as a 'medium' must be regarded as untenable. The language is the poem itself: it is the 'poetic word', which is necessarily coincident with the poem as 'the setting-itself-into-work of truth' determined by Heidegger as the essence of poetry. (pp. 5-6)

Unquestionably, Akwanya is right. And this, again, goes back to the fact that the language of literature is not the normal language which is utilized in day-to-day circumstances, and that it has much to do with poetry. Mark, for instance, the following excerpt from *There Was a Country* by Achebe (2012):

I worked on my writing mostly at night. I was seized by the story and I found myself totally ensconced in it. It was almost like living in a parallel realm, a dual existence not in any negative sense but in the way a hand has two surfaces, united in purpose but very different in tone, appearance, character, and structure. I had in essence discovered the writer's life, one that exists in the world of the pages of his or her story and then seamlessly steps into the realities of everyday life. (p. 35)

Without doubt, language use here is literary as it has the markers of the language of literature. For, its poetic quality, and "the rhythm and the cadence native to or supported by" (p. 239) it is all in stark portraiture in the above excerpt. In fact, in much of the work, literary language permeates it.

And now, to return to an earlier matter, which is the experimentation that Achebe does with the general format of narration of his personal account, the memoir is organized into short chapters, which make for easy reading. Built also into the work's matrix is the fact that Achebe can sometimes juxtapose poetry and prose. But though this is unique, and lends credence to the individuality of the memoir, one does not really see the point of it beyond these facts. If anything, the juxtaposition of prose and poetry is rather unsettling. For Azuike (2008), however, "the 21 subheadings treated in part 1 of the book were garnished with 4 poems, randomly interspersed, and which provided climactic reliefs in some sections, and in others, anti-climactic breaks; or simply, irritating distractions where the poetic density appeared more tasking or teasing for the average reader" (p. 367). There may be positives brought about by the inclusion of poetry to the memoir, as Azuike describes. But what one sees in the context of the hybridization of prose and poetry is, again, somewhat disorienting. And it is not a question of being an ordinary reader.

3. Perspective in the Memoir

Achebe's perspective in the memoir is a unifying one. This is largely because he has written *There Was a Country* to remind Nigerians of the Civil War, causes of the war, and to point out ways by which a similar tragedy can be averted in future. However, there are those who do not share this frame of mind and have, in fact, questioned aspects of his memoir and even the entire point of him bringing the work into being. But voicing a perspective on a circumstance or debating it, if you will, is a necessary requirement to advancing knowledge! This is why it appears inappropriate when Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, speaks of the work in an interview which he grants Sahara Reporters in this fashion: "It is... a book I wish he had never written – that is, not in the way it was" (n. p). In this quotation, Soyinka seems opposed to the very fact that *There Was a Country* is written, however much his effort to mask it with a phrase that comes as an afterthought. But just so as to further dress his erring statement in sensible robes, Soyinka remarks that "there are statements in that work that I wish he had never made" (n. p). For all that, how certain "supposedly" awkward statements in a book translates into a longing for the work not to have been written is off-putting. Yes, "supposedly" because the statements in question are not specified. Besides, how is it that certain statements in the memoir, whose nature is not determined, calls the entire work into question?

But Soyinka's view is not alone. Ernest Emenyonu (2012) reports that others hold similar positions:

In April 2011, before Chinua Achebe had finished writing his new book on Biafra, and before his literary agents found him a publisher, some Nigerian scholars had begun second-guessing in online exchanges, the theme of the book and preparing weapons of attack if Achebe did not write what they had in mind or how they wanted it said. One set a creative boundary for the author maintaining that this was not the time to write biographies. (p. 187)

These kinds of pre-emptive and presumptive perspectives lead nowhere. If anything, they attest to the gross levity with which an utterly serious activity as literary scholarship is approached by some Nigerian scholars. Happily, Achebe is not one to pander to such patent absurdity, for want of a better term. In fact, as Emenyonu indicates, Achebe “calls himself a ‘conscious artist’ with self-confident clarity of perspective in any story he tells. He does not allow anyone to dictate for him what or how to write on any issue in his fiction or non-fiction” (p. 188). The following comments from a famed study by Achebe (1990), “The Novelist as Teacher”, is proof of this stance: “It is important to say at this point that no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience. He must remain free to disagree with his society and go into rebellion against it if need be” (p.42). Yes, there you have it; from Achebe himself. And it is part of the stuff of individuality associated with, and characteristic of, the memoir.

With respect to disagreements that Achebe’s perspective in the memoir is a unifying one, consider Awoyokun’s rail against the work:

Mandela described Achebe as the writer ‘in whose company the prison walls fell down’, with *There Was a Country*, Achebe is the writer in whose company dangerous walls are rising up: walls of tribal hatred, walls of lies, walls of sloppy thinking and lazy research, walls of propaganda and walls of moral ineptitude (as cited in Nwosu, 2008).

This is obviously a fallacy, because, first of all, there is no suggestion in the work that Achebe fans the flames of tribalism. One of the things erroneously deemed tribalistic, though, is the fact that Achebe takes the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was at the time of the Nigeria-Biafra war Finance Minister, to task for using his position to impose a blockade on Biafra, which meant that relief supplies of food would not reach Biafrans, thereby causing great starvation and eventual deaths among them, and Awolowo’s public defence of the policy. In *There Was a Country*, writes Achebe (2012):

A statement credited to Chief Obafemi Awolowo and echoed by his cohorts is the most callous and unfortunate: all is fair in war, and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don’t see why we should feed our enemies fat in order for them to fight harder. It is my impression that Chief Obafemi Awolowo was driven by an overriding ambition for power, for himself in particular and for the advancement of his Yoruba people in general. And let it be said that there is, on the surface, at least, nothing wrong with those aspirations. However, Awolowo saw the dominant Igbos at the time as the obstacles to that goal, and when the opportunity arose – the Nigeria-Biafra War – his ambition drove him into a frenzy to go to every length to achieve his dreams. In the Biafran case it meant hatching up a diabolical policy to reduce the numbers of his enemies significantly through starvation – eliminating over two million people, mainly members of future generations. (p. 233)

This portion of the book has indeed sparked controversies, and understandably so. For, in truth, Achebe’s “impression”, so eloquently presented, may be contested on the grounds of actuality, much as it is persuasive and does largely have elements of trust. After all, it is an “impression”, Achebe himself notes. But to place this circumstance in proper context, the word “enemy” as used by Awolowo for what is essentially a “sibling conflict” is too strong and may, therefore, validate Achebe’s impression. No! “All is not fair in war” (p. 233), especially when it is war within a country. In her tribute article to Achebe, the novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2012), brilliantly weighs in on this:

Some Nigerians, in responding to Achebe, have argued that the blockade was fair, as all is fair in war. The blockade was, in my opinion, inhumane and immoral. And it was unnecessary – Nigeria would have won anyway, it was the much-better-armed side in a war that Wole Soyinka called a shabby unequal conflict. The policy of starving a civilian population into surrender does not merely go against the Geneva conventions, but in this case, a war between siblings, people who were formerly fellow country men and women now suddenly on opposite sides, it seems more chilling. All is not fair in war. Especially not in a fratricidal war. (n. p.)

However, though comments by Adichie (2012) align with Achebe’s perspective on the issue of Awolowo’s policy of blockade, she differs at some point, saying: “But I do not believe the blockade was a calculated power grab by Awolowo for himself and his ethnic group; I think of it, instead, as one of the many dehumanizing acts that war, by its nature, brings about” (n. p). Again, Achebe’s motive for writing *There Was a Country* is positive, not tribalistic and there seems to be no tribalistic leaning in his criticism of Awolowo in the war account as there is grounds for the criticism. Soyinka’s tactful, yet sharp remark when discussing the book alongside the relationship between both men is, therefore, mistaken. It reads: “That is a different kettle of fish, a matter between him and Awolowo – which, however, Chinua did let degenerate into tribal charges” (n. p). But Soyinka (2021) would later admit to the work’s rectitude in an interview with the American-based Nigerian novelist, Okey Ndibe, that *There Was a Country* is “an honest piece of work”(personal communication, July 21, 2021). Indeed, this quality of honesty associated with the work is also backed up by Emenyonu (2012) who states that *There Was a Country* has an “unapologetic tell-it-like-it-is tone. In the book there are no sacred cows, and no individuals or institutions are above reproach” (p. 191). In fact, the following excerpt from Achebe (2012) in *There Was a Country* speaks volumes about the integrity of the work:

I think around March 1968, when we were in a position to achieve a confederation, we should have accepted the chance or opportunity. When we were insisting that Biafran sovereignty was not negotiable, as the government thought at the time, we ought to have considered the tragedy of the situation, because this country would have been much better if we had a confederation of four to six states, other than what we have now. Around the time of the Kampala talks there were definite signs that a confederation could be achieved. The Biafran side was adamant on the fact of sovereignty being nonnegotiable. (p. 126)

This, then, offers a helpful insight into the foregoing. Here is a person who emerged from a catastrophic Civil War in which his side was at the receiving end. And yet, he writes in this frank manner against his people when it could have been understandable if he had written otherwise! Thus, the question of the text being said to indulge in “lies” as Awoyokun accuses is certainly untrue.

In like manner, charging the text as Awoyokun also does with “sloppy thinking and lazy research” is truly and abysmally an error in judgement. For, just see how Awoyokun writes so disdainfully of a serious memoir that Emenyonu (2012) endorses in the following terms: “One of the greatest attributes of *There Was a Country* is the profound scope and depth of research that went into it to establish the veracity of sources, validate each controversial evidence, and substantiate the basis of seemingly untoward allegations or judgmental declarations” (p. 190). Of course, Emenyonu couldn’t be more correct! Admittedly, one can go along with his remarks that Achebe looks back to the past “over which ordinary memory seems to be fading or, is dusty” (p. 190). This must be the reason why, after detecting weaknesses in the text, Emenyonu further writes that:

It is my expectation that any future edition of the book will remove a few minor infelicities. There should be consistency in the use of the terms ‘Igbo’ and ‘Igbos’, the latter is less accurate in referring to the Igbo group or as a plural form. The distance from Owerri to Ogidi is not *forty-three miles* (17). Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was not published in 1946 (113). Sam Agbamuche, and Major Philip Alale were found guilty of planning to *overthrown* Ojukwu’s regime (135). The over forty thousand troops of the Third Division, *lead* by army colonel Benjamin Adekunle... (137). This young man (Dick Tiger) from a town near Aba (Amaigbo is not near Aba) (138). Jonathan Uchendu NOT *Johnathan* (173). However, these, individually and collectively, do not detract from the great merits of *There Was a Country*, unsurpassed by any work of fiction or non-fiction published so far on the Nigerian/Biafra war. (p. 195)

It follows then that memory can be “fading” or “dusty”, but thinking in the memoir is certainly not “sloppy”. Nor is a profound and deep research report of “333 full pages” (p. 190) lazy! Further, the accusation by Awoyokun that *There Was a Country* also indulges in “propaganda” and “moral ineptitude” (as cited in Nwosu, 2008) is equally false. This is owing to two facts. First, as Emenyonu (2012) avers, which comments contain borrowings from Achebe:

From the onset, Achebe defines his premise and objective for *There Was a Country*. Definitively, it is a ‘personal history’, because it is an account seen from his own perspective, of ‘how the rain began to beat a people’ (his people) at a critical moment in history. And for *raison d’être* he informs the reader, ‘It is for the sake of the future of Nigeria, for our children and grandchildren, that I feel it is important to tell Nigeria’s story, Biafra’s story, our story, my story’ (3). And to make the story truly ‘personal’, he situates the events within his individual life span and experiences: ‘I begin this story with my own coming of age in an earlier and, in some respects, a more innocent time. I do this both to bring readers unfamiliar with this landscape into it at a human level and to be open about some of the sources of my own perspective. (p. 189)

Interestingly, here, as in the entire range of the memoir, “perspective” as both term and standpoint are a recurring motif. However, though “perspective” is a thing largely “personal” and may indeed hint at “subjectivity”, the memoir is far more objective than it can be said to be subjective. And it is, therefore, not propaganda! By reason of Achebe’s thinking in Emenyonu’s quotation above, the Awoyokun’s “moral ineptitude” (as cited in Nwosu, 2008) characterization of the text is also inaccurate. Second, elsewhere in the memoir – precisely, in what follows, Achebe (2012) asks poignant questions that claim attention:

As a writer I believe that it is fundamentally important, indeed essential to our humanity, to ask the hard questions, in order to better understand ourselves and our neighbors. Where there is justification for further investigation, then I believe justice should be served. In the case of the Nigeria-Biafra War there is precious little relevant literature that helps answer these questions: Did the federal government of Nigeria engage in the genocide of its Igbo citizens through their punitive policies, the most notorious being “starvation as a legitimate weapon of war”? Is the information blockade around the war a case of calculated historical suppression? Why has the war not been discussed, or taught to the young, over forty years after its end? Are we perpetually doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past because we are too stubborn to learn from them? (p. 228)

This, no doubt, speaks to Achebe’s moral fibre in the memoir. Indeed, the war should be discussed and taught in schools so as to prevent similar future occurrences. As a corrective, Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses’ work, which is in itself angled towards that effort, states that “the conflict should be considered by students of genocide” (n. p.). Earlier in the article, however, Heerten and Moses (2014) decry the dearth of literatures and indeed of robust interest on the Nigerian Civil War, saying:

The Nigeria–Biafra war that raged between 1967 and 1970 made headlines around the world, above all for the major famine in the secessionist enclave of Biafra, and prompted a major international relief. It was a genuinely global event. Yet by the late 1970s, it was seldom talked about outside Nigeria. Since then, it barely features in scholarly and popular accounts of the period. The conflict is also virtually entirely absent from the field of genocide studies, which began to form in the closing decades of the twentieth century. (n. p.)

Again, the war should be deliberated and taught, not just to students of genocide but to students in general in order to avoid similar future occurrences. It is also because by all accounts, war, especially of such magnitude as the Nigerian Civil War, is quite simply evil and pointless! Which is why it needs to be fully engaged! Unfortunately, in this part of the world, Nigeria, there is a general notion to be quiet about certain things or the ugly facets of history and that it is by so doing that peace is made manifest. Thankfully, Achebe (2012) does not back this idea, and literature on the war is better off having his own contribution

to it, especially given the candour and individuality of his memoir. And while, as he indicates, it is “Nigeria’s story, Biafra’s story, our story, my story” (p. 3) that he tells; it is sufficiently clear that Achebe’s narrative is one of unification no matter its shortcomings. Nor is its moral compass mislaid! More to the point, as in Kristeva’s notion of “double destinations” (p. 43) in her theory of intertextuality which means a thing that can be “doubly interpreted” (p. 43), *There Was a Country* can likewise be doubly explained as having these interwoven constituents, narration and perspective, which together set up the framework of the memoir’s art and individuality.

4. Conclusion

By means of a critical tool, designated the figure of “double destinations” which is actually a feature of Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, Achebe’s *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* has been examined and two broad issues picked up. These issues are narration and perspective. The one treats such items and makes statements on them as the mode of accounting of the memoir is conventional in its design. That is to say, the writer does not experiment with the order of narration which is the beginning, middle, and the end. He, however, experiments with the general way of narrating the memoir in the sense of collocating prose and poetry, thereby validating the text’s distinctiveness, if somewhat unsettling. Achebe’s use of language in the memoir is literary, simple, splendid, pleasurable, and uniquely his – the language is, in addition, charming and compelling. In saying that Achebe’s use of language in the memoir is literary is, of course, to align with Akwanya, formalist critics, and Heidegger that the language is not the ordinary kind put to use in daily transactions. In fact, as Akwanya recognizes it, the notion of literary language does not reside in registers or the choice of words; it is something which pertains to poetry and is able to speak by means of what it says and by the rhythm and cadence intrinsic to the language in question. Similarly, the memoir is written in short chapters which facilitates effortless reading.

The other issue makes the overriding points that Achebe’s perspective in the memoir is one of unification, candour, and positivity, not tribalism, and then builds a case around them. However, it concedes that there is the situation of memory lapse in the memoir. Of unification, this can be seen in the very fact that Achebe has written about the war to remind Nigerians of the Civil War and its causes and has indicated ways in which an identical catastrophe can be averted in future. With regards to frankness, it is apparent in the memoir that Achebe is downright candid about the issues he has raised, without favour or bias towards anyone. In fact, he even blames his people for their adamancy during the war effort. It is precisely this brutal candour of approach that makes him set forth views which have been misunderstood as tribalistic. The writer, however, is positive in his memoir and instances which have already been considered attest to this point.

Again, there is the aspect of memory lapse in the memoir, which as the critic Emenyonu detects, are in terms of: (a) the inconsistent use of the terms ‘Igbo’ and ‘Igbos’; (b) an error in deciphering the distance between Owerri and Ogidi; (c) an error in the publication date of Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard*; (d) use in error of the term ‘overthrown’ when it should have been ‘overthrow’; (e) a mistake in the use of ‘lead’ which should have been ‘led’; (f) the town, Amaigbo, is not close to Aba; (g) the name ‘Johnathan’ as written should have been correctly spelt as ‘Jonathan’. But these do not, as it is also the thinking of Emenyonu, impair the work. In the end, it is made out that as with an attribute of Kristeva’s intertextuality which specifies that an object of knowledge can be explained in two varying ways, *There Was a Country* can be interpreted using two interwoven components, narration and perspective, which jointly constitute the basis of the art and individuality of the memoir.

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