

Rethinking the Notion of Truth in Christopher Anyokwu's *Naked Truth*

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Abstract

Truth is a timeless and universal phenomenon. It has enthused critics and philosophers who had existed before now, such that they perceived it as a concept worthy of inquiry. However, in this present time, critical study on the concept of truth is arguably minimal despite quotidian encounter with it even in a form more vociferously appearing than its pristine form. This study is therefore prompted by the dearth of investigations on the relation between truth and social re-evaluation and re-engineering in this postmodern period. Thus, this paper re-examines the notion of truth in terms of its practical function towards re-engineering the society through the exploration of the layers of truth presented in Anyokwu's *Naked Truth*, using a conceptual framework. The major finding in the text reveals that truth, as a phenomenon, is essential to the re-evaluation of some conventional social values and the realization of self-recreation necessary for engendering harmonious human relationship and utopian society. The paper concludes that truth is not merely a concept that is reducible to philosophical discourse or theorization but substantial in its workings on ensuring human development through a reconstruction of the self for healthy human relationships both nationally and internationally.

Keywords: Truth, self, society, human development, relationships.

Introduction

The relation between the "self" and perception is deeply grounded in conviction. This conviction is unarguably a highly subjective stance of truth which disallows any form of influence from any alternative opinions that could undermine it, thereby making it, the subjective truth, an unsubstantiated truth. In every society, there exist different perceptions, and by extension, convictions, on the same phenomenon which by no small means define such society. There are times when these differing convictions may collide on certain plane(s) to congeal into a general conviction characterizing a group of people. This collision is possible only when the different personal convictions strengthen rather than undermine one another. This is arguably the basis for truth formation at the general level not at the level of the individual, for this will require a probe into how individuals form their convictions on the basis of perceptive evidences. The possibility of the collision of convictions induces the possibility of sets of collisions of convictions that may be at variance with one another, thereby presenting multiple truths even on a single phenomenon in a society. The multiplicity of truth is what Weir (2008) has established with his adopted terminology, "truth formulae" (p. 374) which he claims stabilizes relation across a set of elements: representation and presentation, words and things, enunciatory and enunciated.

This inevitably presents the undeniable existence of truth as a concept, the complexity of the nature of truth, and the pivotal role played by truth in the understanding of the “self” and society. It is based on this that “truth” enthused critics and philosophers who had existed before now, such that they perceived it as a concept worthy of inquiry. However, in this present time, critical study on the concept of truth is arguably minimal despite quotidian encounter with it even in a form more vociferously appearing than its pristine form. The autochthonous exegetes of truth which merely present it as a concept whose essence lies in itself have been wholly absolved by scholars of today, that no attempt, arguably, has been made to rethink “truth” in its entirety not merely from the perspective of understanding the “self” and society. It is in this light that this paper re-examines the notion of truth in terms of its practical function towards re-engineering the society. To this end, the paper discusses and interprets the variegated truths presented in Christopher Anyokwu’s *Naked Truth*.

Truth as a Concept of Inquiry: Literary and Philosophical Perspectives

The concept of truth is timeless and universal. Its nature has since the classical period been under investigation by illustrious scholars all over the world. In the classical period, the concept of truth was polemical. Protagoras and Gorgias had a sophistic view of truth, which restricts the nature of truth to human’s cognition and secular world as well as relativism (Habib, 2005). Apparently, phenomenologists subscribe to this conviction of the nature of truth as they opined that the “thingness” of a phenomenon is activated by the cognition of the “intuiting object.” A repudiation of this view which restricts truth to sophistic account of the world was championed by Plato, who adopted a dialectical method to pursue and exteriorize another version of the nature of truth. Plato’s conception of truth is an idealization of the concept, in which its existence is restricted to the ideal realm. This view, as much as it relegates humanistic perception of truth, extols imagination as the only mental faculty through which one can access the “ideal” truth.

The notion of truth has often been entwined with the production of arts since the classical period. Some of the descriptions of “truth” from this perspective had been given from the matter of fact, while some had remained mystical (Richard, 1930). Aristotle’s notion of truth is discernible in his argument of what kind of truth is presented in Arts and History. The former, he argues, presents generic truth, while the latter presents particular truth. His notion of truth is also noticeable in his submission that the portrayal of character should be truth to life. This notion of truth conspicuously evolved from matter of fact. The mystical notion of truth hacks back to the sophistic view of truth. Wordsworth (2001) writes of truth as the object of poetry. This object (truth) is initially fact(s) elicited from real life situation but which later becomes mystified truth through the exertion of cognitive actions, imaginative process on it. This process invests the object with the truth-value which remains immanent to the consciousness of the poet. Richard (1930), comments on this kind of truth that it “gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appears, and receives them from the same tribunal.” (p. 257)

The mysticism of Wordsworth’s notion of truth is informed by the obscurity or vagueness in the description of truth. The only lucid statement about truth in this description is that which states its significance to the tribunal to which it appeals and the reciprocate essence

it gets from the tribunal. How much truth can be *self-testimonized* and carried alive into the heart by passion remain vague in Wordsworth's description. The notion of truth as presented by Keat (2004) is even more absurd as he approximates truth to beauty; beauty to truth. He asserts that truth is whatever imagination apprehends it to be: "What imagination seizes as beauty must be truth- whether it existed before or not..." (Keat 2004, p. 535). This beauty is therefore a form of knowledge which is only accessible by imagination, thereby relegating reason as mental faculty. However, Keat (2004) fails to clarify the level of relationship between the two concepts which are obviously different from each other. Coleridge further mystifies "truth" through his differentiation of *natura naturata* from *natura naturans*. The former, he posits, is an idle copying of the mere nature which answers to the notion of beauty. The latter is the true essence of truth as it "presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man" (as cited in Richard, 1930, p. 258).

Nietzsche (2001) challenges the established Western notion of truth, language and intellect. Contrary to the western notion of truth, he presents truth as an "arbitrary construction of experience" (Habib, 2005, p. 519) that is ever illusionary and elusive of absolute reference as well as remains canonical through the forgetfulness of its illusion or falsity. He avers that truth is,

... a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphism, in short a sum of humans relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions.

(as cited in William et al., 2001, p. 878)

The radical view of truth inherent in this definition is that it is highly subjective and false in nature. It is subjective because it's immanent to the consciousness of the subject and false due to the non-transcendental referencing of this consciousness in terms of language. The "cognizing subject" only certifies the quiddity of a phenomenon which is the fact about such phenomenon as it appears to the subject's consciousness.

The concept of truth has also been investigated by Martin Heidegger in his essay titled, "The Origin of the Work of Art". He revisits the discourse of truth presentation which has always been the criterion for differentiating Art from History. He asseverates that art originates from itself, "art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical" (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 716). He further defines art as "the setting-into-work of truth." (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 717) This truth is the consciousness of the poet which is called into being by language. This truth is not pre-given but created. It is not merely the given facts in the corporeal world which are in themselves "open place"; conventional truth but a result of the pure reflection of these facts. A lucid explication of this truth is given by Habib (2005, p. 717): "art has the power to transform our earlier and "ordinary" conceptions of truth, exposing the unreality of the arrangements of our ordinary life, releasing us from the closure and rigidity of conventional perception."

Heidegger insists that the role of language in art in relation to truth presentation transcends its communicative role. He writes that “language alone brings what is... into the open for the first time... language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings being to word and to appearance.” (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 717) Thus, Heidegger’s idea of language as poetry in itself accounts for his definition of art. Therefore, language does not only project truth in poetry, it preserves it as poetry “takes place in language, became language preserves the original nature of poetry” (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 717). In his description of language in relation to poetry in his essay titled, “Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” he exhibits that his notion of truth is mystical as he positions language, the purveyor of truth, beyond human control where he asserts that man is “bespoken by language” (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 719). This is apparently a counter-argument to Nietzsche’s view that language is incapable of accessing truth, the ‘X’ truth. Hence, Heidegger’s notion of truth is traceable to the biblical account of truth where word is presented as directly synonymous to God.

The references in the foregoing paragraphs to the various perceptions of truth by these eminent scholars are reflective of the writer’s attempt to restrict the discourse on the nature of truth to the domain of literature, even when it appears that some of these scholars were great philosophers. This latter observation implies that the investigation of the nature of “truth” is not the sole enterprise of literature but Philosophy; it is a concept of inquiry in Philosophy. It has been firmly established by scholars and philosophers alike such as Fernandez (2009) and Inwagen (2013), that truth as a concept is indefinable; it continues to elude any systematic and logically formulated definitions, even from a novel perspective, that tend to fully or partially explain its nature (essence and/or inner structure). However, several theories of truth have been formulated by philosophers in order to clearly explicate the nature of truth. These theories include the Correspondence/Realist theory, Coherence/Anti-realist theory and Pragmatic theory among others. Fernandez (2009) has painstakingly divided all the theories of truth into two different categories: “Substantive theories” and “Deflationary theories” (p. 58).

The substantive theories according to Fernandez (2009), consists of the Correspondence/Realist, Coherence/Anti-realist and Pragmatic theories of truth that present the traditional views. Although these theories present variegated contending views of truth, they however invest in truth certain essence, nature and internal structure that make it worthy object of inquiry in Philosophy. This investment is not such that essentialize truth in terms of its practical function towards social reformation but mere academic endeavour. This essentialization of truth is even more greatly undermined by the deflationary theories that deny truth of any essence, nature and composite inner structure. Fernandez (2009) avers that “Deflationary theories of truth hold that truth is a relatively trivial concept with no important connections with other concepts such as meaning and reality”(p. 64). Concisely, much of the philosophical inquiries or examinations of the concept of truth is not very much different from the inquiries conducted in literature. These inquiries present the concept of truth as often shifting from the realm of fact to idea and even void (the consideration of truth as a trivial concept) to attain its form/essence.

Thus, the shift in the discourse of the concept of truth from secular to astral plane, factualization to idealization and reality to imagination has necessitated the need to answer some salient questions concerning the notion of truth. These questions are: When is a

phenomenon considered as truth? What psychological processes could have occurred to validate the nature of a phenomenon as truth? As much as it is believed that there exist both objective and subjective truth, when does subjective truth pass as objective truth, and in the obverse? Considering the biblical essence of truth, is it really the pathway to spiritual, physical and psychological liberation? This inquisitorial probing is inevitably necessary as it is prompted by the dearth of investigations on the relation between truth and social re-evaluation and re-engineering in this postmodern period.

Truth in Naked Truth

Anyokwu's *Naked Truth* re-visits the issue of truth in the light of its significance to the re-engineering and regeneration of dystopic and utopian societies respectively. The collection is divided into three parts: "Truth about Here and There," "Sentimental Truth" and "Home Truth." The resonance of the word "Truth" in the divisions amplifies the pertinence of truth in the vortex of the poet's re-engineering, regenerating and liberation agitations. The pervasiveness of the word "Truth" in the collection of poetry cannot be ignored such that a critic like Onuoha (2018) strongly asserts that the "... title of the text analysed herein draws attention to itself. Notionally, the truth is actually naked but the writer's decision to qualify the truth shows that he is no longer referring to existential truth but a personal truth occasioned by his own experiences in life" (p. 17). Anyokwu (2015), in this collection, uses Sidney's conception of the function of a poet to project his conceived truth about the status quo of the country; for a poet should not tell "what is or is not, but what should or should not be" (p. 6).

In the poem titled "In my father's house", the poet uses the theological truth which is based on the Judeo-Christian conviction to express his psycho-sensual perception of the secular space replete with despicable realities. The expression, "In my father's house" (p. 52), strongly validates the poet's projection of the oddities of the house because of his access to the glaring truth of the "house," which remains obscure to the outsider. The abashed and perilous truth of this "house" includes filial infanticide, truncated life at the height of prosperity and eerie occurrences neatly captured with the deployment of gnostic images: "Shadows" and "Reptiles." Thus, the "house" is presented not as a haven with eternal peace- a theological version of truth-but hell with excruciating inhumanity and shattered peace, which precipitate the death of dreams. The poet may not have referred to his paternal house but a generic-cum-symbolic "house" with ignoble and harrowing truth. This truth which is objective has not eluded the psycho-sensual grab of the poet. Through this grab, the general truth is placed in the crucible of deep thinking, wherein the execrable realities steam out and become *graphicalized*. In other words, the generic truth becomes his "considered opinion" (Hallen, 2002, p. 23) as he reflects on the effects of the truth on the society. Hence, the profundity of the poet's reflective grab of this general truth of the house is evident in the gravity of the enunciated effects of these loathsome realities: shattered peace causing crevices in the house and callousness. The last section of the poem is worth quoting to establish the poet's profound thought-pattern on the effect of the general truth of the symbolic house.

In my father's house
Shadows roam around

With bolts of venom
Reptiles are creepers
That vein the lintel.

In my father's house
Dreams die at dawn.
(Anyokwu, 2015: p. 52)

In "Memory" and "Life", Anyokwu (2015) gives a transcendental essence to memory. His misprision of Osundare's *Horses of Memory* (1998) is conspicuous in these two poems. Memory is deployed in these two poems as a conveyance of ephemeral truth which in totality is the absurdity of life. This absurdity is nonetheless the truth about life that is commonly shared by people all over the world. In Yoruba philosophy, the nothingness of life is amplified in the conception of the world as market where merchants trade their wares only to return home at dusk; a stage where actors enact their predetermined roles. That the poet crowds "the void with activity" (p. 53) and "Hustle and bustle/ Staking out enclaves, stacking up/ Treasures" (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 51), depict humans' engagement with time which is an ephemeral truth. The transcendental essence of memory subsists in the eternal truth, wherein it serves as a connection between transient and eternal life. This eternal truth transmogrifies consciousness through death and effect the purgatorial cleansing of the human psyche.

In the eponymous poem, "Naked truth", the poet scathingly critiques the abashed realities of the country. The biting force of the vituperations clouds the imaginative hollowness of the poem. However, the ignoble truths are irrefutable. The poem enunciates the country's scientific, technological and ideological dependence on Europe, cyclical politics with no clear cut vision, neo-colonialism- a reiteration of the pristine mistakes of the forebears, excruciating inhumanity heralded with the historical civil war (the Biafra War of the 1960s). Concisely, the poet deploys panoply of coetaneous and autochthonous realities to present certain ignoble truth about the country. The poet's deployment of these realities for social re-engineering and regeneration of utopian society confirms Ogunrotimi's conception of Nigerian literature:

Obviously, the use of coetaneous historical and social materials will for some times dominate Nigerian literature as literary artists continue to confront a never-ending and tragically unvariegated human experience. Much as the country continues to grapple with the anathema of corrupt leaders in military toga and in political *agbada*, writers will continue to approach their art from a primarily functionalist vista and expend their literary verve protesting against topical social evils that remain interminably inexorable. (Ogunrotimi, 2010, p. 175)

Poetic Imagination and Vision: The Itinerary to Truth

Many critics such as Nkosi (1981) and Senanu & Theo (1988) among others have classified African poetry into phases. Osundare (1996) classifies modern Nigerian poetry into four different generations based on the sensibilities of each generation. They are the Nationalist poets, Wasted Generation, Angry Generation and the Anxious Generation. To this typology of

modern Nigerian poetry, Anyokwu (2016) has added the “Lost/Careless Generation”. In his opinion, the poets of this generation lack lucid poetic vision and philosophic depth capable of engendering or regenerating utopian society. He asserts the dearth of Masonic nous; eclectic erudition and intellectual catholicity, meticulous logistics and contemplative urbane grace, lyrical ebullience and philosophic depth-experience (Anyokwu, 2016), which characterized previous generations in the poetry of this generation.

As the poet himself belongs to this generation of poets, he distinguishes himself as a poet with clear-cut sensibility, a poetic vision of truth purveyor for social revitalization. His adoption of Sidney’s conception of the *utile* of poetry in relation to the source of poetic creativity and truth purveyor established his poetic vision in *Naked Truth*. In pursuit of this poetic vision, he posits another astonishing truth that literary creativity based on cognitive output is an aspect of secular faith, while the poet is invested with some spurious divine powers and prerogatives as a conscious craftsman (Anyokwu, 2013). The basic assumption here is that the poet though inspired by external stimuli, advertently uses his/her mental faculties and creative ability to deploy the social, historical, political and cultural materials and presses them for poetic services. Concisely, this act of poetic creativity makes the truth to be highly subjective as the poet carries it with passion to the heart. How then is this subjective truth to be taken seriously considering the possibility of its paucity of ratiocination in the light of this passion? This truth can only be taken seriously when it passes as objective truth, by which it is de-clouded or free of sentiment and its “life-advancing and life-preserving” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 466) capacities are projected into the consciousness of others, in order to ground it as a shared belief.

This is exactly what the poet has done in the second part of the volume which is subtitled, “Sentimental Truth”. In both “Moments” and “Mother”, the poet enunciates the life-enhancing and life-preserving capabilities of some female figures that assume the status of goddesses. They serve as the itinerary to the spiritual liberation of the poet, by extension, the country as a whole. The readers may have been led into believing that these figures are highly subjective to the poet’s consciousness based on the classification of the poems under this section of the poetry. However, the underlying indubitable truth expressed in these poems is the overwhelming influence of Europe on Africa, especially Nigeria in this neo-colonial era. This ignoble truth is emphasized in “Moments” with the first three lines: “Again and again/My sacrifice bears me/To your alcove, O great mountain” (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 68). This is more glaring in “Mother” as the poet’s personality remains tenuous; his personality is immersed in the personality of the goddess and his existence is arguably defined by the existence of the goddess: “Without your presence, Mother/I lean into void, clutch mirages for an anchor/And stumble at high-moon for direction” (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 69).

Truth as a Re-evaluation

In “Woman”, “Can’t we love without making love” and “Heart cry”, the poet expresses certain sentimental truth that is geared towards the sensitization of human relationship, especially with the opposite sex. This truth radically challenges the established or conventional truth about some values: the inferiority of women in the patriarchal society, premarital consensual sex as requisite for love and distance as a love-waning phenomenon. The poet presents an anti-African

perspective about women, in which he acknowledges their effeminate power which qualifies them to be companions to men rather than properties in the marital sense. He alters and re-orders the structure of gender relationship, the men being serfs and subject to women based on their irrefutable wheeling and procreative power and essence.

Witch and Angel
Saint and Seductress
Heaven and Hell
Like fire, you either incinerate
Or fashion-forth beauty spawn
Womb- man,
Woe- man
Woman
We men at your feet
Bow and worship.
(Anyokwu, 2015, p. 70)

As much as Anyokwu's sentimental truth, a highly subjective truth is motive-bound and expressed with language, it is pertinent to investigate the extent to which the sentimental truth in "Can't we love without making love?" and "Heart cry" is a "practical lie" and determined by language. The truth in both poems has its origin not in the "Peace Treaty" that is absolutely geared towards self-projection, ideological promotion or accrument of power by which human relationship is defined. It is not the truth called into itself by language. The answer to the rhetorical question and conception of distance are truths that engender self-preservation. The certainty that agape love extradites AIDS, STDs, "unwanted pregnancy" and "myriad hazards of copulation" (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 72); distance invigorates love and makes it inebriating rather than wane it, originates from the peace treaty that is signed with self not others. This truth implicitly surpasses language as it is not determined by language.

Thus, the truth in "Can't we love without making love?" and "Heart cry" is not such that is determined by language nor originated from the peace treaty that attempts to prevent what Nietzsche (2001) has described as "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" (p. 876), a Latinate expression translated as "war of all against all" which is a phrase associated with Thomas Hobbes (William et al., 2001). This "peace treaty" from which truth evolved is that whose trajectory is towards self-preservation, self-reformation, self-rehabilitation and self-discipline, whose matrix engenders healthy human relationships and utopian society. This is arguably the basis of the poet's definition of truth in "Remembering to forget":

Truth is a village lunatic hawking public shame
And private indiscretions in the marketplace
Buyers flee from his shocking wares like the plague
And yet truth follows them wherever they go
(Anyokwu, 2015, p. 88)

Elegiac Truth and the Re-creation of “Self”

As much as elegy is used to express grief over the loss of a beloved, it exteriorizes the universal truth about human nature which is the inevitable termination of life at the end of its anfractuous path. Death, the subject of elegy, is a universal empirical truth that is paradoxical in itself: destruction and recreation. The destructive aspect of death is its most established part throughout the world. The poet is not exempted in the acknowledgement of this destructive aspect of death. He decries this aspect of death in “The iroko has fallen”, “Death” and “Death is a fallacy”. In fact, he asserts the indeterminable terminating power of death in “Death is a fallacy” in the following lines: “Death’s a pin-prick that deflates man’s vaulting airs/In hours of glory” (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 92). He writes further that, “Tomorrow, the earth will have its dinner,/Awaiting its next breakfast- you or me” (Anyokwu, 2015, p. 92).

Hence, this destructive aspect of death is an objective truth by which fear is universally imprinted on the human psyche. This fear is implicitly the frame which embodies the dual aspects of death as well as the mechanism through which the recreation aspect of death is activated. It is the driving force of spurious-death which activates the recreation aspect of death. This spurious-death is a deliberate psychical reprobate of narcissistic and self-depreciating values. The narcissistic values logically engender solipsistic attitude, while self-depreciating values encourage the culture of mediocrity, in which man is rendered tenuous as a result of the consideration of the inevitability of the real death. Aptly, the psychical repudiation of these values is an itinerary to the recreation of the self, in which individual rather than being solipsistic, empathizes with others and he is galvanized towards embarking on valuable immortalizing project, in order to relegate death to fallacy.

This relegation is what Anyokwu (2015) has artistically presented with the life of Chigbo Ekwealo in “Death is a fallacy”. The character of the poem reduces death to a fallacious state as he outlives it through his academic works which are described as highly philosophical. The character does not engage in undue accumulation of wealth but thorough search for knowledge, which he deploys in his attempt to effect a humane society. Therefore, the description of Ekwealo’s academic works as high sounding intellectual works presupposes their subtle value to the re-positioning of humanity. Therefore, this lofty task performed by the character certifies his immortality. Some lines of the poem are worth quoting in this regard:

Armed with a sole philosopher’s stone
You took life long aim at Death:
A restless David high on knowledge-hubris
On the treacherous crag littered with the blanched remains
Of fore-seekers, you jabbed, fainted, ducked in time
To parry a wayward roundhouse,
Your opponent, a veteran unknown to have conceded
A bout to mortals-
Yet, you preserved.
(Anyokwu, 2015, p. 92)

Hence, the recreation of the self through spurious-death is arguably a truth that is in a sense, a pathway to both spiritual and physical liberation. This form of freedom is only granted when there is a conspicuous repulsion for materialism. Thus, the emancipation of the society from socio-political and cultural impasse and social re-engineering can only be guaranteed through the potpourri of individuals who have undergone this process of self-recreation through spurious-death.

Conclusion

The expressed notion of truth in this essay is given impetus both from mysticism and matter of fact. Truth as a phenomenon is essential to the re-evaluation of some conventional social values and the realization of self-recreation necessary for engendering harmonious human relationship and utopian society. Thus, it is not merely a concept that is reducible to philosophical discourse or theorization but substantial in its workings on ensuring human development through a reconstruction of the self for healthy human relationships both nationally and internationally. It is undeniably the pathway to psycho-spiritual and physical liberation if it is granted an inhibited operation in the consciousness of humans.

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