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Abstract

A decade and a half after Achebe revised Conrad's jaundiced vision of men-eating Africans in his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958),¹ sociolinguists were noting that the anthropophagi were not African but European and devoured not men but words. As the French Marxist-influenced linguist, Louis-Jean Calvet, contends in his *Linguistique et colonialisme* (1974), 'Le premier anthropophage est venu d'Europe. Il a devore le colonise ... il a devore ses langues; glottophage donc.'² 'Glottophagia' thus refers to the fact that many African languages were 'devoured' by the colonizing powers and supplanted by the European languages which, Gerard reminds us, had themselves fallen prey to the Romans' Latin linguistic imperialism.³ Modern colonial glottophagia was achieved, according to Calvet, by demoting African languages to the status of 'patois' or 'dialects' in a way analogous to the Victorians' demotion, in the vocabulary, of African kings to chiefs and of non-Muslim priests to 'witch-doctors'. Calvet pushes the argument even further by suggesting that the turn-of-the-century practice of linguistics inexorably completed the process of glottophagia in the colonies under European rule: 'La linguistique a ete jusqu'a l'aube de notre siecle une maniere de nier la langue des autres peuples, cette negation, avec d'autres, constituant le fondement ideologique de notre "superiorite" de l'Occident chretien sur les peuples "exotiques" que nous allions asservir joyeusement' (*Linguistique*, p. 10). Linguistic imperialism is here presented as the most insidious and pervasive aspect of colonialism, for, more than economic or political imperialism, it depersonalizes the colonized to the extent of estranging him from his own language and his linguistic group.

The Logos-Eaters: The Igbo Ethno-Text*

A decade and a half after Achebe revised Conrad's jaundiced vision of men-eating Africans in his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958),¹ sociolinguists were noting that the anthropophagi were not African but European and devoured not men but words. As the French Marxist-influenced linguist, Louis-Jean Calvet, contends in his *Linguistique et colonialisme* (1974), 'Le premier anthropophage est venu d'Europe. Il a dévoré le colonisé ... il a dévoré ses langues; glottophage donc.'² 'Glottophagia' thus refers to the fact that many African languages were 'devoured' by the colonizing powers and supplanted by the European languages which, Gérard reminds us, had themselves fallen prey to the Romans' Latin linguistic imperialism.³ Modern colonial glottophagia was achieved, according to Calvet, by demoting African languages to the status of 'patois' or 'dialects' in a way analogous to the Victorians' demotion, in the vocabulary, of African kings to chiefs and of non-Muslim priests to 'witch-doctors'. Calvet pushes the argument even further by suggesting that the turn-of-the-century practice of linguistics inexorably completed the process of glottophagia in the colonies under European rule: 'La linguistique a été jusqu'à l'aube de notre siècle une manière de nier la langue des autres peuples, cette négation, avec d'autres, constituant le fondement idéologique de notre "supériorité" de l'Occident chrétien sur les peuples "exotiques" que nous allions asservir joyeusement' (*Linguistique*, p. 10). Linguistic imperialism is here presented as the most insidious and pervasive aspect of colonialism, for, more than economic or political imperialism, it depersonalizes the colonized to the extent of estranging him from his own language and his linguistic group.

My own recent findings bear witness to a form of glottophagia or even neo-glottophagia in West African Europhone literature.⁴ We shall call it 'textual glottophagia', an extension of linguistic glottophagia. Such a phenomenon is most apparent in the case of 'indigenization', that is, when the writer attempts to convey African concepts, thought patterns and linguistic features via the European medium. This is most pointed-

ly epitomized in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, where the sedimentary Ijo etymons gnaw at the European language and where, conversely, the repressed Ijo tongue falls prey to a textual glottophagia by which English devours the African etymons and morphemes which now function as the linguistic debris of a near-extinct language. By an analogous process, the Ijo world-view becomes a decaying vision. By exhibiting the dominant language's protean possibilities of adaptation, indigenization ('relexification' in linguistics) can thus help revitalize and recirculate the target language in a perversely neo-colonial fashion at the expense of the source language. This mutual cannibalism is endemic, I believe, in all acts of indigenization and, more generally, in all strategies of literary decolonization and revanchism.⁵

When extended to the Igbo-informed novel and, more specifically, to the Igbo gnomic or proverbial discourse in the Nigerian novel of English expression, glottophagia becomes discursive and, as we shall see, this glottophagia provides an ironic comment on the manducation of the word, since proverbs are made of words which are destined to be 'eaten'.

The Igbo-informed novel is made of discursive segments that belong to the vast corpus of African traditional oral material like the myth, the panegyric, the agonistic contest in eloquence, rules of address, praise-names, dirges, proverbs, maxims, apophthegms and epigrams. When transposed to the written text of West African novels, in an attempt to recapture traditional speech and atmosphere, these discursive elements constitute what Alioune Tine has called the 'ethno-text'.⁶ I here propose to analyze the stuff the Igbo ethno-text is made of and, in the latter part of this paper, to theorize over the eventual death of all African formulaic tradition.

The grafting of the ethno-text onto the novel is common practice among Europhone West African writers. The first characteristic of the Igbo ethno-text is that its constitutive elements recur in various forms in all novels that share the Igbo ritual patrimony. Such is the case with the prayer over *oji* or cola made every day in Igboland. Variants can be found in *Things Fall Apart* (p. 22), in Onuora Nzekwu's *Blade Among the Boys* (p. 48) and Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda* (p. 13).⁷ All three variants of the prayer over *oji* have a common denominator: the characteristically Igbo proverb or *ílú* concerning the kite or hawk and the eagle: 'Égbé bèrè ùgò béré nké sị íbè yá ébèlà, kwá yá nkù.'⁸ This *ílú* marks the ethno-text as specifically Igbo.

African proverbs have been described as repositories of communal wisdom, mnemonic devices for effective communication, and educational tools. Because they have their origin in specific communal experiences and are reproduced by a memory, their epistemological basis may give

us insight into the (male) African apperceptive mode.⁹ In the Igbo art of conversation, proverbs are both modes of communication and retrievers of communication. As the Yoruba say: 'Owè l'esin òrò bí òrò bá ñonù òwe l'a fi nwá a', that is, 'proverbs are the horses of speech; if communication is lost, we use proverbs to retrieve it.'¹⁰

The use of proverbs in Chinua Achebe's native culture-based novels – *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* (1964) – had often been considered as an embellishment or a stamp of authenticity and it was only in the early seventies that critics became aware of their functional significance. Bernth Lindfors, for example, convincingly ascribes to proverbs 'a grammar of values' after Herskovits's phrase.¹¹ Austin Shelton is the only scholar thus far to have provided a detailed analysis of those *ílú* in Achebe's fiction.¹² His work also has the merit of initiating the shift away from what Arnold termed 'the tired, basic topics ... like "oral elements in the writings" of a few well-known authors'¹³ on to a refinement of concern for the specificity of the ethno-text.

Shelton distinguishes three types of proverbs: 'those drawn from *ílú* used among the Igbo in general, those of Achebe's Awka-Onitsha area, and those which he created or modified' (Shelton, 109). Although it is incorrect to credit Achebe with any proverbial 'creation', I will focus on the modification that he may have brought to the original *ílú*. I will therefore expand and systematize Shelton's thematic organization, as it applies to *Arrow of God*.¹⁴ These new categories of proverbs bear witness to both an evolutive itinerary and a gradual erosion, as if words were eaten away at.

The first category of proverbs are those that are recognizably Igbo *ílú* used (although less and less) among the Igbo. For example, let us consider these two proverbs in Anambra Igbo which are related to change, as most proverbs in Achebe's novels are. Both proverbs comment on the Igbo village's first contact with the new religion, although only the first appropriately identifies Christianity as the 'white disease':

- (a) 'As soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace' (AG, pp. 177, 42), relexified from

í naa onye áru-òcha aka,
(If) you {shake take} person body-white('s) hand,

ò chọ́ọ́ {kàí kíe} bié yá omà.*
he want(s) that you him {embrace. print/press.

(b) 'The man who brings ant-infested faggots into his hut should not grumble when lizards begin to pay him a visit' (AG, p. 163; also pp. 72, 178) from the Igbo,

Ónye kpátara nkù ahụhụ ziri ngwere ókù. (Shelton, 104)
 Person who carries in firewood infested by ants invites lizard.

or a variant from another area of Igboland:

Ónye kpátara nkù arurụ ò
 Person (who) fetches firewood ants are (in)
 yá lèé anya ñgwere n'úlò yá.*
 he (should) look eye (for) lizard in house his.

The second category groups proverbs whose usage may be restricted to Achebe's Oka-Onitsha area or to the speakers of a particular area, as in this *ílú* of 'riverside Igbo origin' (Shelton, 105): 'The Chief Priest raised his voice and pleaded with them to listen but they refused saying that they must *bale the water while it was still only ankle-deep*' (AG, p. 159). Incidentally, this proverb, couched as it is in English aphoristic terms, may lure one into assuming that it is English and therefore foreign to the Igbo ethno-text.¹⁵ On the other hand, this Central Igbo *ílú* – 'When a man chases two rats at a time, he ends up catching none' – is only remotely related to what is in use in Achebe's area: 'We are like the puppy in the proverb which attempted to answer two calls at once and broke its jaw' (AG, p. 232):

Ñkítá zaa { úzò òku àbúó } àgba ékwòjé yá.*
 òku úzò àbúó

Dog answer call places two jaw { breaks it }
 dislocates it.

Although this last proverb, like many others, can easily be translated into English proverbial wisdom, the cultural context from which it originates is not easy to identify for the non-African reader. Indeed, it refers to the dog which, while being within hearing distance of nursing mothers calling him to come and lap up their children's excrement, hears two such calls simultaneously and gets confused. This proverb is unambiguously traditional and rural, for this social reality may be on the verge of disappearing in urban centres. If the social reality that sustains it disappears, the proverb will not survive oral mnemonics.

The third category of proverbs are *ílú* that Achebe modified by (a) substituting elements (i.e. the slave for the chicken) or (b) omitting elements such as the reference to slavery and slave-catching:

- (a) 'Let the slave who sees another cast into a shallow grave know that he will be buried in the same way when his day comes' (AG, p. 32), from the Igbo:

Ọkúkọ nọrọ ñga ánàbó
(Let) chicken remain where they are butchering

òkwa mara ótu esì ábó yá. (Shelton, 100)
bush fowl to know how to butcher it. (i.e. how it would be butchered)

- (b) 'When the handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing' (AG, p. 16), from the Igbo:

ikwé n'aka fèéla isi-ñkụ áká,
(If) to shake the hand passes elbow,

ó ghòólá òkpụkpa. (Shelton, 103)
it has become seizing (as one snatches a slave).

Achebe's omission to slave-catching, in the second example, may be construed as a concession to his audience (but it is unlikely because in the first instance, the original chicken has been replaced by a slave), to the English language or, more conceptually, to text-formed thought. Yet, it may also be interpreted as a 'structural amnesia' reflecting what may happen in contemporary Igboland for, as Walter Ong contends about the Gonja's genealogies in Ghana, 'the part of the past with no immediately discernible relevance to the present [will] simply fall away.'¹⁶ Homeostasis thus refers to the subordination of the integrity of the past in proverbial discourse to the integrity of the present.

Contrary to the proverbs of the third category that tend to expand meaning, these proverbs in the fourth category abstract the essence of an original *ílú*, albeit in a more prolix style: 'If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time' (AG, pp. 233-34):

úri pútara n'àzị,
Dance (that) came out for a generation,

àzị a gbá yá. (Shelton, 103)
(that) age-group should dance it.

The movement from the first to the fourth category corresponds to Achebe's itinerary from synchronic to diachronic representation. Indeed, he moves from the representation of *ílú* as Igbo speakers would make use of them (e.g. between 1850 and the turn of the century in *Things Fall Apart*) to the literary, imaginative use of gnomic speech. The dual function of the *ílú* is thus to lend verisimilitude to Igbo traditional speech and to allow the writer's artistic temperament to shape the literary situation. In his commitment to this dual function, Achebe takes it upon himself to be the retriever of communication when the narrative

cannot by itself carry the full weight of the Igbo ethno-text. Achebe does what an ingenious user of *ílú* does: he proverbsalizes.

As a proverbsalizer, Achebe adapts original proverbs and maxims as used in the traditional/rural milieu to the urban milieu by bastardizing the terse form of the *ílú* and vulgarizing its meaning. This is an immediate consequence of homeostasis, the symbiotic link a proverb establishes with the present moment. For instance, in *A Man of the People*, Mrs Nanga, the wife of a corrupt politician, says: 'My brother, when those standing have not got their share you are talking about those kneeling.'¹⁷ This in fact refers to an *ílú* which is rendered in its full form in a novel set entirely in tribal society, *Things Fall Apart* (p. 5): 'Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them' from an original Igbo *ílú*:

Ánwú gà-ètí ndí kwí ọ́tọ́ túpù ò tíwé ndí gbúsírí íkpèrè
Sun will shine those standing before it shine (on) those kneeling knee
nà-òkpúrù há.*
at-under them.

Similarly, Mrs Eleanor John in the same novel tries to render an *ílú* in Pidgin. The result is one of 'utter trivialization and vulgarization', as Obiechina remarks:¹⁸ 'My people get one proverb: 'they say that when poor man done see with him own eye how to make big man e go beg make e carry him poverty de go je-je' (MP, p. 16), meaning that when a poor man realizes what is involved in becoming a big man, he will beg to carry on with his poverty without ceremony. In this and other examples, Achebe aims at showing how the urban Igbo speaker is alienated from the traditional art of conversation and the proper use of proverbs. The implication is that what may survive is, for reasons linked to homeostasis, the Pidginized form of the original Igbo *ílú*.

If we except a novel like *Things Fall Apart* (which contains 29 *ílú*, presumably to show the falling apart of things proverbial), the density of proverbs in rural novels (a minimum of 129 in *Arrow of God*) are in inverse proportion to their scarcity in urban novels (a minimum of 27 in *A Man of the People*). This testifies to their gradual extinction in increasingly urbanized contexts. This does not mean, however, that any *ílú* transposed to an urban setting is systematically bastardized. Achebe simply adapts them to modern realia, when advisable. Such is the case with sayings involving the Igbo concept of *chi*, which are used in various forms, depending on the rural or urban setting. The core conflict of the individual vs. the community in *Things Fall Apart* revolves around the Igbo concept of 'chi' that Achebe rendered as 'personal God'. The 'Chi' often comes up in this common saying:

Ónyé kwé, chí yã èkwé. (Shelton, 90)
Person agrees, chí his agrees.

or in several variants involving the bird 'nza': 'His [Okonkwo's] enemies said good fortune had gone to his head. They called him the little bird nza who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his chí' (*TFA*, p. 22) which is said of Okonkwo when he beat his wife during the Week of Peace. This can be traced to two variants of ílú:

(a) ñzà rìjùè áfó ó mákwàgh ónyé kéré yà.
wren satisfied belly, he knows not who made him.

(b) ñzà rìjùè áfó gà, échéfùè chí yà.
wren satisfied belly his, forgot chí his. (Shelton, 91)

The Chi-based adages can be traced not only throughout *Things Fall Apart* (e.g. pp. 13, 19, 92) but also throughout *Arrow of God*, for Okonkwo's breaking of the communal bond may be compared to the village Umuaro's conceit when going to war against another village (*AG*, pp. 14, 27). It is also therefore appropriate that in *No Longer At Ease*, set in an urban milieu, Joseph Okeke should use Igbo to caution to Obi, Okonkwo's grandson, who has just been acting cockily at a job interview: 'And I can tell you that a man does not challenge his chí to a wrestling match' from 'Mmádù ànàghì échéché chí yà ákà mgbá' (Shelton, 93). Here the saying has been adapted to suit the urban modalities of 'wrestling' with a prospective employer in the post-colonial, pre-Civil War context of *No Longer At Ease*. Wrestling is here controlled by the real-life situations in which the word is used here and now' (Ong, p. 47). Wrestling may thus become an archaic reference, a noetic 'white' metaphor that is empty because no longer homeostatically linked to the present. The reference to the Chi or to the bird nza in turn may become the meaningless 'trace', to use a chirographic metaphor, of a traditional ílú, like children's nonsensical syllables from orally transmitted songs. Moreover, such a proverb, not being part of the original, vituperative context, is no longer agonistic and thus ceases to exist as proverb.

Referring to a popular politician's challenge of the national hero at the end of *No Longer At Ease*, Achebe deftly juxtaposes the seemingly insipid English 'translation' with the Igbo ílú:

'He is a foolish somebody,' said one of the men in English.

'He is like the little bird nza who after a big meal so far forgot himself as to challenge his chí to a single combat,' said another Igbo.¹⁹

Incidentally, the chi-based sayings can be traced not only through Achebe's novels but also in any novel with an Igbo ethno-text such as, for instance, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, which contains thirty references to the Chi.²⁰

To understand the gradual erosion of gnomic speech, it is crucial to understand what proverbs are and what happened to them when reduced to writing in English. Before being written down, proverbs were rhythmic, mnemotechnic, and formulaic. Proverbs are essentially 'word-events' (from the Hebrew 'dabar' meaning both word and event) that were 'sounded' and thus power-driven. Their structure is mnemonic, that is intertwined with memory systems (Ong, pp. 33-34) and thus highly rhythmic, for rhythm aids recall. They reflect orally patterned thought and are therefore not occasional as they are in Achebe's novels but incessant. They used to form 'the substance of thought itself' and even 'the substance of the law' (Ong, p. 35).

Since proverbs come from a sound-dominated verbal economy, committing them to writing has a 'diaeretic, separative function' (Ong, p. 61). Writing is closely associated with death. This is best illustrated in the still widespread practice of pressing living flowers to death between the pages of a printed book (or the modern *liber*) and of appending both proverbs and locutions in Latin, now a dead language, to the *Petit Larousse illustré*. But, paradoxically, just like the deadness of a text ensures its endurance and its phoenix-like capacity for resurrection into limitless living contexts, the Igbo *ílú* may be resurrected by its own destroyer, the urban English-oriented context, or recuperated by another genre outside of the novel or by the new electricity-based orality.

Transposing proverbs from the oral to the written medium is thus disabling and foreshadows the death of a species, for proverbs are generally collected in writing when about to die. The further transposition of orally-bound formulae into an alien language is thus doubly disabling. This phenomenon has historical antecedents. It is similar to the disappearance of the Aramean *besôretâ* and all mnemotechnic procedures that ensured its oral transmission, when it was committed to Greek writing.²¹ Achebe himself in his foreword to Whiteley's *Selection of African Prose* had mentioned the difficulty of 'translating Igbo proverbs and riddles (inu) because of the resulting isolation from the whole pattern of allusion and direct cultural reference in the African language'.²²

Thus isolated and cut off from their original context, proverbs fall prey to a textual glottophagia whereby Igbo proverbs are 'eaten up' by the English words of the European narrative. Yet, 'proverbs,' Achebe tells us, 'are the "palm-oil" with which words are eaten' (TFA, p. 4) – *ílú ká n'èjí èrí úkà* (Shelton, 86). In order to be memorized orally, words had to be manducated or 'eaten', as if by a mandibular mouth.²³

In the universal tradition of 'eating the Book' before or during alimentary rites, oral proverbializers are thus mouths or articulate mandibles that recite and recall.

The eating of words is not only characteristic of the Igbo art of conversation but also, for instance, of European medieval vocalization when manuscripts were commonly read aloud or *sotto voce*. Poised vocalization helped the reader 'eat' the words *qua* sound units that were going to become visual units in print cultures.²⁴ Proverbs thus function not only as the main discursive elements of the Igbo ethno-text grafted onto the novel but also as the oral mindsets that reveal the historical origins of all literature out of oral verbalization.

As in all oral or residually oral cultures, the words of the Igbo proverbs are taken from the mouth of the proverbializer to another mouth to be eaten. Committing these proverbs to writing is thus a treason in many ways: in the sense in which the familiar Italian maxim understands transliteration and translation as treason, 'traduttore, traditore'; in the sense in which Robert Escarpit understood 'creative treason' as adding one's 'creative mite to a continuous, collective creation',²⁵ but specifically as a treacherous kiss. The kiss that signalled the beginning of echoic recitation between the *talmid* and the *Rabbi* has been turned into a Judas kiss. The message has indeed been corrupted in that it has not been transmitted from mouth to mouth. It is not 'echoed' nor 'sounded' when reduced to writing. To pass the proverbs on from mouth to text, that is not *by word of mouth* is unnatural to the proverb or the *byword*, as a proverb is also called. To further pass them on from text to the reader or 'eater of the book' short-circuits the original process, for the mouth that receives those nurturing words can only swallow, digest and churn them into 'food for thought'.

Because the proverb, in the Igbo art of conversation, is compared to the 'palm-oil' that aids digesting or manducating the words, the proverb may be considered as a discursive lubricant. Once the palm-oil of the Igbo traditional art of conversation, proverbs are now more like a narrative lubricant helping in the expert transplanting of the ethno-text onto the Europhone novel. Like a scion grafted onto a main body, the *ílú* remains an unfamiliar utterance.

Proverbs in the Igbo-informed novel of English expression have thus been reduced in quantity and quality and are now part of a residual orality. Proverbs, like other gnomic material, are becoming a minor rhetorical device or a minor gnomic tool in both the society and the novel, as was the case in European societies after the Renaissance period, when proverbs were deliberately down-graded.²⁶ Although, as Gérard reminds us, 'it is often unwise to regard literary artifacts as faithful reflections of a social situation',²⁷ the Igbo-informed novel mirrors not the

present but a future where Igbo culture will become increasingly chirographic at the expense of proverbial discourse.

The gradual extinction of a discursive species such as the Igbo flú and other orature-based devices recuperative of the ethno-text could signify the gradual death of Igbo and all African oral formulaic tradition. In a chirographic context, discursive glottophagia replaces the manducation of the word. What is being eaten here is the *logos* or *verbum* of the proverbium or proverb. Achebe *qua* proverbializer voices non-sounded words. The present-day proverbializer is thus textually bound to be a logos-eater.

NOTES

1. See Chinua Achebe 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1978), p. 9. See also Achebe's 'Viewpoint' in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 Feb. 1980, p. 113, for a continuation of the Conrad debate in the larger context of the relationship between Africa and Europe.
2. Louis-Jean Calvet, *Linguistique et colonialisme. Petit traité de glottophagie* (Paris: Payot, 1974, 2è éd. 1979), p. 10. Further cited in the text and referred to as *Linguistique*.
3. See Albert Gérard in his 'Introduction', Part IV-Comparative Vistas in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Vol. 2 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), p. 1014, note 2. For a more detailed discussion of the pitfalls in Calvet's Marxist-influenced theories, see Gérard's 'Glottophagie: littérature africaine et pouvoir linguistique', *Écriture française dans le monde*, IV (1982), 2/3, 27-33.
4. See Chantal Zabus, 'Linguistic Guerilla in the Maghreb and the West African Europhone Novel', *Africana Journal*, Vol. 15 (1990), 276-92, and in *Criss-Crossing Boundaries in African Literatures*, eds. C. Zimra, K. Harrow & J. Ngate (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990).
5. For a full discussion of *The Voice*, see Chantal Zabus, 'Under the Palimpsest and Beyond: the "Original" in West African Europhone Literature', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. Geoffrey Davis & Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), pp. 93-111.
6. The word was coined by Alioune Tine in 'Pour une théorie de la littérature africaine écrite', *Présence africaine, New bilingual series*, No. 133-34 (1st & 2nd quarterlies, 1985), 106. The literary models from the African oral tradition which he lists correspond to 'les formes simples' in André Jolles, *Formes Simples* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 17.
7. References are to the following editions: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958); Onuora Nzekwu, *Blade Among the Boys* (London: Hutchinson, 1962); and Nkem Nwankwo, *Danda* (London: Heinemann, 1964).
8. My original informant is Mr Oko Okoro, Dept of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria. His samples are marked with an asterisk. They were later nuanced by Cyprian Ekwensi ('Personal Interview With the Author', Dakar, Senegal, 22 March 1989).

9. See Sylvanus Inibong Udoidem, 'The Epistemological Significance of Proverbs: An African Perspective', *Présence africaine*, 132 (4th Quarterly 1984), 126-136; E. Obiechina, 'Language' in *Culture, Tradition, and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 156; Patrick Essien, *Proverbs as Cultural Tools of Education in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Chronicle Press, 1981), p. 28 and *passim*; and Harold Scheub, 'Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 28, Nos 2-3 (June-Sept. 1985).
10. In *Yoruba Proverbs: Translation and Annotation*, ed. B. Lindfors and Oyekan Omwoyela (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, African Program, 1973), p. 1.
11. See M.J. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1958), p. 56. See also Marjorie Winters, 'Morning Yet on Judgment Day: The Critics of Chinua Achebe', in *When the Drumbeat Changes*, ed. Carolyn A. Parker & Stephen Arnold (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981), pp. 178-79.
12. Austin Shelton, 'The "Palm-Oil" of Language: Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30, No. 1 (1969), 103. Further cited in the text and referred to as Shelton. The samples are his, unless otherwise indicated. The diacritics have been provided by Prof. Philip A. Nwachukwu, Dept of Igbo and Linguistics at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, Nigeria, and the Center for Cognitive Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, U.S.A.
13. Stephen Arnold, 'African Literary Studies: Profile and Guide to a New Discipline', in Donald I. Ray *et al.*, *Into the 80's: The Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 128-151. See also Albert Gérard, *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 1263. He contends that African literatures in European languages are now moving towards increased 'differentiation', 'diversification' and the fragmentation of the literary corpus into smaller, if not 'tribal', 'sub-sub-sets' (p. 1014). Let us note, however, that 'Igbo' is the only reference in titling to a specific ethnicity.
14. Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1974). Further cited in the text and referred to as AG.
15. Kenneth Harrow contends that this *ilú* is an English aphorism and therefore a 'foreign element' that has 'fatally infiltrated Okika's speech to Umuofia in Part Three of *TFA*'. He concludes that the proverb using the metaphor of Eneke the bird preceding this 'English aphorism' is in fact 'now recalled, not as a living word but as a relic'. In 'Ringing the Changes: Proverb and Metaphor; Master Trope/Feminist Discourse in *Things Fall Apart*', a paper read at the ALA Conference in Dakar, 20-23 March 1989, MS, p. 11.
16. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London & New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 48. Further cited in the text and referred to as Ong.
17. Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 98. Further cited in the text and referred to as MP.
18. Emmanuel Obiechina, 'Language', *op. cit.*, p. 177.
19. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 148.
20. Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979). There are references to the *chi* on pp. 9, 18, 27, 28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 44, 45, 50, 73, 74, 77, 78, 91, 137, 158, 166, 168, 174, 200, 201, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 219. For a full discussion of the *chi*, see Austin J. Shelton, 'The Offended Chi in Achebe's Novels', *Transition*, 13 (1964), 36-37; and 'The Cyclic Principle of African Personality', *Présence africaine*, 45 (1963), 145-50. For a reassessment of the meaning

- of *chi*, see F. Anyika, 'The Chi Concept in Igbo Religious Thought', *Africana Marburgensia*, XXI, 2 (1988), 41.
21. The example concerning the *besôretâ* and all mnemotechnic procedures is a bit more complex than it appears at first, for the targoûmiste's words are the result of oral calquing, rendered accessible through the targoûm *midrâshisant* from the Hebraic written word of the *Tôrâh*, the *Miqra*, that which is shouted, into the Aramean verses of the *Mishna*. See Marcel Jousse, *La Manducation de la parole* (Paris, 1975), p. 193, n. 37.
 22. Quoted by Peter Young, 'Tradition, Language and the Reintegration of Identity in West African Literature in English', in *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*, ed. Edgar Wright (Washington, D.C.: Inscape, 1976), p. 47.
 23. See Marcel Jousse, op. cit., pp. 234 & 238, where he calls this mouth 'the nafshâ-gorge mangeante (et apprenante)'. Beyond Freud and after Lacan, Gérard Haddad in *Manger le livre* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1984) reveals the veiled dialogue between Freud and his religion and, more particularly, the *Midrach* or *Haggada*. He thereby inscribes Jewish alimentary rites within the larger unconscious practice of eating words, materialized in writing and organized into a book. See also Jacques Lacan, 'L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient', in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).
 24. See Walter Ong, 'Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization', *New Literary History*, Vol. XVI (Autumn 1984), No. 1, 1-11.
 25. Robert Escarpit, "'Creative Treason" as a Key to Literature', in *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, ed. Elizabeth and Tom Burns (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), p. 361. Originally printed in the *Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, No. 10 (1961), 16-21.
 26. See Jill Mann, 'Proverbial Wisdom in the Ysengrinus', *New Literary History*, Vol. XVI (Autumn 1984), No. 1, 95.
 27. Albert Gérard, *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, op. cit., p. 49.
- *) A modified version of this paper has been published in *Semper Aliquid Novi: Littérature Comparée et Littératures d'Afrique: Mélanges Albert Gérard*, ed. János Riesz & Alain Ricard (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990), 305-16.