materials in much the same way as the traditional myth-maker. Myth-making does not mean that the African was not rational; quite to the contrary, myth is a rational and philosophical activity able to meet two criteria of philosophising, viz.,
a) the tendency of the human mind to consider a variety of data within a chosen compass of thought and to circumscribe these data by means of laws of causality,
b) the ability of the human mind to speculate in the widest sense of the term, with fewer guidelines provided by a schematized canon.

Okpewho joins African philosophers in arguing rather too defensively that the foundations of the philosophical activity of today were laid in traditional society, and that therefore Africans should develop a defined philosophy of culture combining Cheikha Diop with Wole Soyinka.

The book is scholarly and erudite but provides a very useful analysis amidst the current nationalist urge for the use of oral tradition without adequate concern for a proper understanding of its core elements.

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This book, first published in 1975, was reissued in paperback in 1980 in the Cambridge *African Studies Series* (No. 14), and remains a useful contribution to the study of post-1950 West African fiction even though many more novels and a great deal of criticism have appeared since. It was written at a time when African writers and critics were reacting strongly against many of the European and American commentators who seemed to be cashing in on the vigorous growth of West African literature. But the causes of irritation went deeper. Colonialist attitudes to Africa were reflected in the condescensions and misrepresentations of a body of popular English writing such as Henty’s and others’ schoolboy adventure fiction and what came to be known as the “crocodile” school: Hag-
gard, Wallace’s *Sanders of the River*, or Burroughs’ *Tarzan* books. But even major English fiction, the West African novels of Conrad, Greene and Cary, could arouse sensations ranging from respectful unease to open rage. This is the starting point of Dr. Obiechina’s book, though not its main concern.

Obiechina had already initiated valuable work on the Onitsha market literature in which he looked seriously at what many thought of as a kind of comical sub-literature, cheaply printed pamphlets often with spectacular titles (*How to get a lady in love: Drunkards believe bar as Heaven*). In this literature, “‘traditional’” values of the village merged with others, routinely called “‘material’”, often in effect exotic and full of western promise. As an old man in Achebe’s second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, tells the hero Obi, just returned with a degree from London, “without doubt you have returned from the land of spirits”. But Obiechina sees current Nigerian literature in English as suspended between village and town, the old social/religious patterns and the new barbarities of the foreign which, symptomatic of a release of massive energies, are characterised by social incoherence. Reading the “‘village’” novels, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, or Amadi’s *The Concubine*, the western audience, he suggests, needs to understand traditional religious beliefs and practices before the novel can be comprehended. But at the same time the novels of city life, Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* or Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana*, demand of the western reader that he make an effort to inform himself about the nature of the modern conflicts they explore, both root (the village values such as, in the case of Soyinka, the immense importance of Yoruba religious tradition) and branch, in what must be for many readers the perplexing realities of Nigerian city life. The twisted tree grows, a proper subject for the hand of the artist, but the western reader needs to be something of a literary botanist to understand its strange growth, it seems.

At this point, though, I think we are confronted with a problem. In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, the period Obiechina is concerned with, West African literature was principally directed toward a western audience, in particular by way of the Heinemann *African Writers Series*. By 1972 the series had over 150 titles, by far the most successful of which was Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, a novel about the impact of British administrators and missionaries on Igbo village life just before the turn of the century. Obiechina stresses the