Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.

This 50th anniversary edition of Achebe’s famed classic of Africa continues my quest for a better understanding of the continent of Africa with the plethora of cultures, customs, history and misconceptions surrounding it. Originally copyrighted in 1959, this work has been a mainstay of African literature and according to Kwame Anthony Appiah “may well be Africa’s best-loved novel. While fiction, the work contains the stories of Okonkwo’s tribal life thereby revealing nuances of the beliefs, values, and daily life of a proud people. The subsequent encroachment of European missionaries illustrates the massive impact of how things—culture, tradition, daily life, and family--fall apart.

I had read Achebe first in the World Literature text. Intrigued by both his story and the biographical account and influence, I bought this text to supplement my World Literature experience. When I pursued a study grant with Franklin College to Senegal, I added it to my more immediate reading list. After attending the African Studies Institute at IU this summer (the grant unfortunately was not funded), I made it a priority.

My lack of experience with the cultural mores and history as well as the pronunciations of names proved a challenge as I worked to keep old prejudices and assumptions at bay and various characters and situations straight. Achebe lyrically weaves daily life and its accoutrements into the lives of his characters—“As he broke the kola, Unoka prayed to their ancestors for life and health, and for protection against their enemies. When they had eaten they talked about many things about the heavy rains which were drowning the yams, about the next ancestral feast and about the impending war with the village Mbaino…Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (6,7).

This is a worthy and fascinating read for students in World Literature but also for anyone interested in expanding global horizons. Without being didactic or judgmental, Achebe illicits insights and prompts more questions that additional study of Africa will help me answer.

Mrs. Davis, June 2009