

# Sailing for Ithaca

*poems by*

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Black  
Lawrence  
Press

*for*  
*Emily*

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# Memoir

*for Chinua Achebe*

Born Nigerian, my masters were confronted  
With cultural subjugation and political tyranny

And thus, arrived at the fundamental credo—  
*Our cultures too exist.*

And—  
*Democracy. Democracy. Democracy.*

Through long sojourns within their forests and seas,  
I've stumbled upon the brown scrolls of my soul,  
And read their blue prophecies.

Each saying—  
*Seek the country within.*

I'm going.

Let all who follow come as they are.  
Teacher. Technician. Watchman . . .

Treat these songs as you like.  
Hack them with scythes.

Loosen and say them as slang.  
Whatever you like.

Enter where you can.  
Leave in delight.

# In the Other Nigeria

## A Way of Seeing

If at night you enter a forest with a lantern—  
Flame, risen and warm against the glass—

And the mast of that ship within you is blown,  
Caught, and alive with wind,

Pull your oars in  
From *Reason's* sea.

If later within that lantern,  
The flame thins and dies,

Owls from the deck's dark corners will emerge,  
Singing like your dead grandfather,

Playing flutes like his wives,  
Drunk and dancing upon the stern.



## In the Other Nigeria

After elections,  
Instead of gathering ballots  
And painting blue votes red,

Paying to blot out opponents' faces  
Or marking them "X",

Politicians take balloons to each house,  
Play *cops and robbers* with children,  
And sing nursery rhymes.

They wink at lesbians.  
Drink with homosexuals.

Hang up their coats  
And join old men at farms.

They rake gutters.  
Sweep yards.

Take mortars from old women  
And pound yam.

They eat cold soup  
With the poor in town

And leave office  
With the exchequer intact.

# Homecoming

It's evening. Lagos heat has cooled. At least slightly.

Mama Sule, with a wide iron ladle is turning bean cakes in hot grease.

Mama Risi is beside her talking, perhaps again of Baba Sule leaving.

They see us coming.

Mama Sule turns to Mama Risi. Her voice rises—

“Look at them. China Banana and Monkey.”

“*Ssh!* They'll hear you.”

“So? Let them hear me. *Chin-chin-chun* and him.”

“We better smile and wave.”

They look our way. Smile. Wave.

My Korean wife and I do the same.

They continue—

“Of all the girls in America, why must he marry Bruce Lee?”

“I don't know my sister. America makes them foolish.”