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Poems

Nii Ayikwei Parkes

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Nii Ayikwei Parkes

Ghana by air

Let the dry savannah winds
grab you by the hair
and drag you
stumbling
through tough clumps
of cow-nibbled grass.

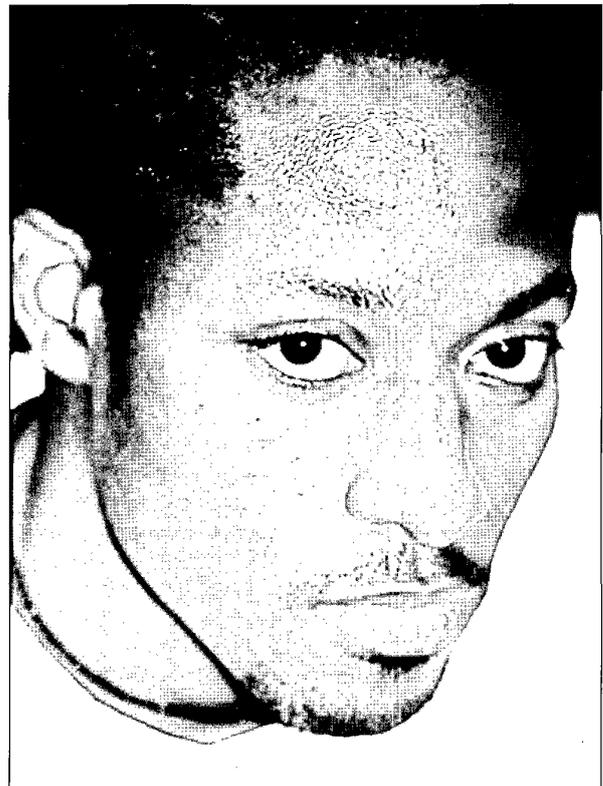
Did you see the children streak by
on bikes – two or sometimes three on the same?
Did you see the striking garments
energised by night dances?

Now the green of the forest
will sweep you across the secret
passages of
Ashanti pride
into the rich red
depths of palm nut soup.

Did you see a woman drag her husband
home by the cuff – insulting him all the way?
Did you hear the market traders
hurling prices down the street?

The lights of Accra
will confound you as you circle
dreamily round
haphazard
houses arranged to fit
sprouting family trees.

Did you hear the blaring
horns – sometimes angry, sometimes friendly?
Did you see two lovers
heading for Labadi beach?



Nii Ayikwei Parkes

Follow them
lift the hem
of the sea

plunge...

you have reached
the centre
of the world.

Orange flesh

The acid burn of life
Is the squirt
From an orange peel
In your eyes.

You can close your eyes
And stop
And live forever
Inert
Protected

Or you can choose
To squint
And endure the pain
That precedes
The juice
Of orange flesh.

jazz at 5 am

I come here from my troubles to flee;
Deep
in a murky pool of bobbing heads
I let the notes splay themselves across my soul,
define sound in their own off-key way...
responding to plucking fingers
jumping keys
and exuberant skins
as voices play catch
across the dim room,
twist my besotted ears
and leave my head clear
for dreams of tomorrow.

body language

tears in silence
irregular breaths stretched out
across recollections

nothing divulged
as though speaking of pain felt
would bring repercussions

body doubled
to protect present from past
replayed from memory

discussion stilled
as though Midas touched all speech
and made silence golden

tears in silence
suffering rendered
in pure body language

River Dance

Meet me down by the river
When the moon sits
In the arms of the old neem tree.

Come dragging your feet
In the grass with your hands
Twirling in the warm night.

Listen for the sound of restless fish
Joyous
In the shimmering water.

You will find me with my eyes
Alight
With the mischief of fireflies
My body as patient
As a leaf ripple.

Maybe tonight we will dance.

Sakumono Magic

a silver morning sky
is the reflection that hums
around his thighs.

and he moves not
in the slow-warming grasp
of the flowing heaven
he encroaches so boldly

from his hands
drip stringy tentacles
which he holds high:
proud son of Sakumono

...then the sun flicks gold
over his bare back
as he swiftly casts his spell

slowly he pulls in
his scales of silver
and threads his way to the bank.

Phantom wars

They came
With their craftsmen
And draughtsmen
Their soothsayers
And bricklayers
Cartographers
And lithographers
And redefined our boundaries

They came
With laughing liquid
And angry powder
To confuse our kinsmen
And take us captive

They came
Trading
And scheming
Laughing
And stealing
Making prisoners of our kings
Drawing blood
And drawing lines...

They slit
Our kingdoms
Into countries
And made nonsense
Of our wars

Festival

Jammed up junctions
Barrage of brake lights
Harmony of horns...
Single string of saloons
In a festival of traffic;
Sweating stress under
the morning's hot hurry.