



Wasafiri

ISSN: 0269-0055 (Print) 1747-1508 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwas20>

---

## Poems

Nii Ayikwei Parkes

To cite this article: Nii Ayikwei Parkes (2009) Poems, *Wasafiri*, 24:3, 107-108, DOI: [10.1080/02690050903016786](https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050903016786)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050903016786>



Published online: 27 Aug 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 17



View related articles [↗](#)

---

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rwas20>



© Sebastien Fabre 2005

# Poems

## Nii Ayikwei Parkes

*Nii Ayikwei Parkes is a Ghanaian writer of poetry, prose and articles who has published three poetry chapbooks: eyes of a boy, lips of a man (1999); M is for Madrigal (2004), a selection of seven jazz poems; and shorter (2005). He is also a contributing editor to The Liberal and runs the African Writers' Evening series at the Poetry Café in Covent Garden, London. Nii's poem, 'Tin Roof', was selected for the 'Poems on the Underground' initiative in 2007. His debut novel, Tail of the Blue Bird, was released in June 2009 by Jonathan Cape.*

### Daybreak at Swanlake\*

The sun has blown its cover  
a clutch of light has escaped  
its dark coat. My father loved

this moment; silence and darkness  
evaporating in a flurry of seconds.  
Now I have claimed it, like I did

his features. Things I would gladly shed  
to erase the burden of reminding  
my family of his absence. I stand

outside the house I grew up in  
treasuring this horizon of solitude  
dreading the sliver of time

when our voices will rise with no reason  
to scream Daddy; my loud siblings  
subdued and waterlogged by grief

my mother's eyes like beggars.

\* *Swanlake is the name of the neighbourhood in South Accra, Ghana where I grew up*

*Wasafiri* Vol. 24, No. 3 September 2009, pp. 107–108  
ISSN 0269-0055 print/ISSN 1747-1508 online © 2009 Nii Ayikwei Parkes  
<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals> DOI: 10.1080/02690050903016786

### *E be so (Red, Accra, 1980)*

*'We have come to the cross-roads  
And I must either leave or come with you.'*  
– Kwesi Brew ('The Mesh')

*E be so we dey do am for here.* He digs  
a knife-wide hole in the ground  
and looks up at me, his eyes like two worlds  
colliding. I stand two feet back trying to conjure  
the streets of London, holding onto  
my six-year-old nonchalance in the face of death.

*I hear say pipol for abroad dey shock them  
plus lactric, but for here e be so we dey  
do am.* The chickens stop squawking  
the moment Red squats, watching from a distance  
as he prepares to cull their number. *Make you  
close your eyes.* I do, but he pulls me forward  
to see the white bird shut its eyes obediently  
as he steps on its feet and wings.

*You see, de hole be where de blood go go  
e be for the pipol for de other side. You  
for no kill chicken by heart, you hear?* He wipes  
the blade on the feathers, slits the neck  
quickly, then holds the twitching body  
over the hole until it stills, empty of fight.

After only nine months living in Accra, this is  
initiation. Red is my living guide, my mystic.  
I stare at the black hole beneath my feet,  
still warm with blood, then at the eight  
chickens lined up like fresh Gladiators,  
beginning to scratch the soil for prey, then  
I hear him say: *Next time e be you go kill am,  
e be so we dey do am for here.*

## Lapse

The Greyhound is late. I've been fast  
asleep too long to know why, but the man  
beside me – Chinese – tells me what time it is.

He turns to the back-lit maze of his phone, taps  
a geometry of buttons, gets lost in an exchange  
about auditions and lost opportunities. I look

across the aisle: the big guy with the *Yankees*  
cap has struck up a dialogue with the Polish  
woman beside him. Her dark eyebrows arch –

an eager pair – in synch under her blonde hail; I can  
tell she's open; so is he, but he's fearful, hasn't  
yet learned the curved asymmetry of lust. There is

already a lapse between her keenness, his lean  
and the speed of his initiative. Somebody should  
tell him that if the lapse grows any longer

the door of chance will close — snap in  
his face. It's already too late. The bus is  
drifting into Harlem, Connecticut a distant memory:

I hear him say *excuse me*, he calls his Mom. A pink  
rose blooms on the woman's cheek, she looks  
outside. I hang my head, exhale, and close

my eyes. The man beside me snaps his phone shut.

## Rich Tea

It is an initiation of sorts, I guess  
the sun already raging in the east, with us –  
boys and girls – massed in the pre-assembly  
hour. The heat is new to me, the glow

framing my Bata sandals, by a distance,  
superior to the light I had grown accustomed to  
in Grange Park. Also unknown is this boy, who,  
with the boldness of an old comrade, spies

a whole biscuit in my right hand and walks up  
to me, arms outstretched. He is tall – Christian  
I later find he is called – and one friend more than  
I expected on my first day at Ann's Preparatory

School. A borderline cockney myself, I am  
staggered by the sharp, muscled edges of his  
diction when he speaks: *give me the biscuit some*  
and, a heartbeat later, *please*; his English, like

my Rich Tea, is broken for easier sharing.