

The Rasta Cycles



By Ibañez

Sometimes called General D of the tribe of Judah,

And Damodar Prasad das

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Instagram: @damodarp1008

Twitter: @Daniels_Prom

email: General.Judah108@proton.me

Website: forestsongs.neocities.org

jaya sri krsna caitanya prabhu nityananda sri advaita gadadhara sri vas adi gaura bhakti vrnda

I

Holy Emmanuel I

Selassie I

Jah!

Rastafari

King Haile Selassie I is the First

Selah

The tall ragged man who stands

Rebellious at the crossing

Hitting the side of the van

Whose driver refused to give

Might have been a Lord

In the assembly of Kings!

II

All's a blazing bonfire burning strongly
Sleepless through the night
About it are seated a hundred noble Queens
And a thousand Kings
Watching its glowing embers rise and fall

In a room attached to the dancing hall
Muzzla Molecules knelt in yearning prayer
Calling aloud in a silent voice
I entered because I knew he was there
And wanted to share
He looked and accepted and we knelt in prayer
The chalice burning
Then I reentered the hall while he ascended the stage
To begin his rhythmic chanting

When Muzzla sang something happened inside
I listened and started jumping
Jumping like a frog
Jumping like a lion
Jumping on the outside
Jumping on the inside
Internal organs massaging

When he blazed the cushu years could he feel
His mortal life augmenting

And once I beheld with my eyes
As he made the cushu bubble and blaze
A sacred flame leap from the bowl
Flaming and dancing

That night he ran on the stage
His inner man singing
In excess of praise his voice raised
In desperate cries cracking
And the music stopped
A Rastaman dropped
Saying
“This way is not the way of praising.”
Then the music came on
Burning the hours of night
To a sunlit morning

Muzzla Muzzla

Muzzla Muzzla

Muzzla Molecules

Muzzla Muzzla

Muzzla Muzzla

Muzzla Molecules

Thus he sang tunneling his lips
Riding through sleep in the morning
As I struggled at the wheel to clasp to waking
Watchful Nathi at my side

Kept my head from nodding
That night we ran through the night
Like sparks of blaze from a lion's mouth
In Sebokeng the kings had gathered

*Lord Nrsimha roars from the Star
Protector of David, King
Flames dance everlasting they do not sleep
On bubbles of light they surround Him
All turned towards His gaping maw
Dancing, massaging the growling God
For only He gives them life and comfort and joy
Sometimes one bubble zips along the orange rays
To mingle in the universe jostling
Confident in the cold reaches of space
Kindling new fire*

III

The pages of the Bible hold an inner meaning
Beyond comprehension in the conscious stream
Knowing ourselves condemned, we live in a world with no God
And all the great keys unnoticed float
But sometimes, I know not how
The connection is made
It is through the meeting which rarely take place
We enter the great story, the dream real
Our every word, thought and deed
The stuff of great legend becoming
Waking from sleep we are born in the world
And we share it with prophets and kings
Knowing each other from times ancient
Raggamuffins of the street

IV

Searching Newtown for a love lost, a memory grown stale

I roamed the dark streets, finding a place like a cave

Where a silent television played

Telling a tale of two men, drunken journeying

Under clouds gone pale

And I drank a beer

Waiting while shadowed people passed near

Sophisticated but green

Worn to nothing by dark dreams

By conversations strained to wit

Following talks' vain twirls no-one else could understand

The cup was running dry, talk growing thin

Biting sarcasm turning more often within

We drank our pleasures to the dregs to find new joys

It was that longing which led my wandering feet to dark shifting streets

Lit by changing robots:

Red

Yellow

Green

In the empty streets at night

Beneath a glimmering rain-washed light

A man packs his street shop

All his goods in bags bulging tight

He hoists them onto a creaking trolley with shop-keeper's strength

And stows them in a dark room he rents

And he returns, the Rasta with the yellow turban
We sit in my car smoking herbs
Talking in turns
I spoke with King Yellow amidst sweet smoke
What have I to tell?
No tales of glory or trials
But I cling to dreams of beauty, of some noble thing

The smoke is white and clean and drifts in curls
Oh Yellow! Oh King! What new discovered joy
In this herb smoking
Once a heady kick mingled with wine
Now I see in it something Holy
His face shines
Beneath a turban wrapped clean
What things did he speak, Oh Lord
What did I see?

“Before I was a rude boy, a thief
“Angry when drunk, mad with the blood of meat
“But Rastaman show I and I livity with blessed herb
“I became a man of peace
“And Jah-Jah I-an-I teach, even He gave I-an-I skill
“To make these shoes
“And He gave you wisdom too”

V

I came now to visit Yellow

His face smiling

To share and hear wisdom from an ancient book

Now made alive in speech

And in his look

Beard and yellow turban protruding

And there one day

In the yellowing-sun-heat-drifts through coloured cloth hanging

(Flags and arcane crafts, clay pipes, beaded belts, hand-made shoes of Yellow-man's shop)

Crouched a man dark like a tall bended tree

Muzzla Molecules

Smelling of the earth and we smoked our herbs

Of the mystery of numbers he wished to learn

Though he knew more than I

Who knew them but for the reckoning

"Life is eternal, I shall never die

"I shall live forever

"Jah! Rastafari!"

"But why do we see all things in nature perish?"

"They are following man who has chosen so

"For if he wants man can have eternal life

"To live and to praise Jah Rastafari!"

My mind buzzed with the herb, more with his word

Such a teaching I had never heard:

Could it be? Can we be eternal?

Growing to live? Living to grow?

And then Lord Muzzla gave me a ring

He made it of black and white beads on a nylon string

I did not know how to accept it

But in false pride and emptiness proclaimed:

“I wear no mark nor symbol upon palm or wrist”

He smiled and gave it again

And then he gave a warning to all who use computers and match-sticks

Their names enumerate: six six six

What does it mean – life eternal?

Is the world all unchanging, time stopped still?

Or is there growth without death, trees eternally tall?

When they drop their fruit do they eternally fall?

His name was Muzzla, the prophet of the South

VI

*There once lived a king who wore no crown
Save locks of grey
His throne was raised upon a step of stone
In a hall of crystal with earthen floors
And the stone of his hall was porfiry and quartz
Pale pink and white, smooth and coarse
Transparent, opaque
A golden mist upon a lake
Gold by day, silver by night
Lit by the stars and the moon
Winds of Winter washed the sky blue
The land was abundant with good crops
Reaping Summer's harvests for Winter's frosts
And when Spring wakes earth with morning dew
The king rejoiced for the year that was new
And the king was friend to all woman and man
And animals and plants and the stones of the land
This king dined never alone
But always a friend shared his home
From ministers of state to the wandering fly
And yet this king was shy
In that land philosophers wandered free
Resting awhile beneath the sunfilled tree
What tales learnt the king beneath the tree?
From Josepha the prophet did he learn
Of strange beings whom the sun did burn*

*With bodies of men and heads of beasts
That sought their refuge beneath the sea
And with wisdom far exceeding man's
Devised the cunning machinery now at his command
Created by God but not as He
They enslave men by exploiting their greed
And the king was named Judah
Josepha proved by numbers and signs
That this age of man was approaching its demise
Showing that it was the age of the beast
Quoting the scripture and praising the East
Judah then wondered what it meant not to die
A world of endless growth and endless life*

VII

In those Golden days all I met were soldiers
Prophets and Kings
Adorned with turbans, coloured flags and coloured rings
But it was their wares I sought
Or so I thought
But what new thoughts and dreams
Awoke
Swirling and dancing amidst the billowing smoke?

First give thanks before, during and after
And replace with wisdom your reckless laughter
Nothing more delights the mind than the wisdom of Jah
Listen to the song of Rasta
Jah Rastafari is the I-tiopian King
He rules from the mountain over everything

One Sunday I drove through a silver rain
To gilt-golden clouds towards a distant place
But fearing the unknown
And having no place of my own
I turned back
To my parent's house

VIII

Of that day it has been sung
Called by Muzzla I came one Sunday alone
The square was bathed silent by late golden rays
The Rastas had gathered to pray
Muzzla who was Josepha, and Issachar and his wife
King Yellow and queen, and the cushu blazed with fire
But I knew not the art and coughed away the fumes
And asked Issachar how to honour the Cush
“This will not harm you, be not afraid
“Draw deeply thy breath, bless the holy place within
“The Cushu shall never cause thee harm
“For tis of earth, water, air and flame”
Then Muzzla who heard placed in my hand
A harmonica of steel to carry the wind

*And Judah walked that day with a lowered eye
For Issachar of Joseph had taught him to breath in the fire
And they all came to a place where a small crowd had gathered
To learn of the plight of Zimbabwe
As the sun shone golden upon the square of stone
The heavens opened with a shower of foam
Muzzla led them before the gathered crowd
Draped in flowing cloths his bearing was proud
With shakers and xylophone, drums and wind
They mingled plaintive voices, calling for God within
All grew quiet*

*The trees swayed in the sunshine mingled with rain,
And Judah lifted his harmonica
And filling his belly with the air from the ground
Blew forth through the steel the primordial sound
With closed eyes and deep breath he began to pray
Now breathing the music, now soothing his pain
He felt now his breath flowing out and flowing in
He saw now a star, blazing within
And he waited until moved to give breath to the song
In the ensuing calm, he felt he belonged*

I played the song with eyes closed
Opening in stillness: the audience remained
And a man held a camera
“We must get the recording!”
“It’s alright,” Muzzla spake, “We have faith”
The seed that was planted would grow in Zion’s field
When I found myself alone I knelt and begged for Grace
And it came with fresh rain
Thus it began, the sprouting of Faith
In a dark and fearful place

I was steeped in Thy beauty so that I might atone
Taught the beauty of life and given a home
I was set on the path of discovery
That gleamed yellow like raisins when my eyes were closed
That rang at the door and shone in the window
That rippled the sky like a soft finger print

That glowed from the book, rang in my ears
So I covered my head and forgot all my fears
And then it rained upon me with golden light
As I humbly played with the Holy Israelites
I walked in a dream
And closing my eyes so I could look within
I was filled with the memory of forgotten sin

*And Judah closed his eyes to look within
To see all his blessings, to remember his sin
For one day in the torpor of heat of late noon
He had gone up into a harlot's room
To grovel before her
And look aside with a bitter smile*

I feared that my past would take everything away
Now I knew remorse, mourned for my sin
And thought how lucky were those who were clean
How I longed to submit to the demoness picture cruel and fair
Of one ancient and wily and her feet are bare

IX

One more thing difficult to understand

The bright joyful smile of barefooted black man

Standing long in ragged clothes with outstretched hand

Cars drive past

Windows closed against cold

Forgiveness in his smile

X

The Rastas blessed the Cush at my flat

A circle of fire

A globe of water

Fire and smoke

Praising Jah Rastafari

Can words make music?

Can they make I to dance?

Can they fill I with joy?

The joy of giving praise?

How did it come that I lived in a place

Ancient and clean, made holy by the past?

Mezuzah in the doorways

Through large windows the light came

Filtered through fronds and flowers

In the wind shaken and waved

It filled a yellow room with space

I had a book shelf too

With tomes unwanted and strange

It was a brief time in a valley of Kings

In a hall of stone

Of green grass through the trees

Of Muzzla Molecules running through the breeze

Rain fell in the park

The sun in the sky made a fiery scar

And the Rastas danced in a bobbing circle

In a circle they knelt in the big yellow room

Ten or fifteen shared the pipe of nut and clay and bamboo

But for the women: there were two

They shared their own, nourishing the womb

A blessing unlooked for

Came by Muzzla's word

"This is forgiveness"

He said

Upon the gift of the book of the magic of the jews

Muzzla Molecules

XI

Africa is the home of the human race
But Newtown is a shifting shadowy place
Those things that were taken while you changed your face
Can never be replaced
Now they've gone and their memory is fading
Gone now's the sword where he took us
Muzzla the bard

My Lord and Lady sometimes reside in the ditch
Smiling untouched
Her mind is fixed upon Him, His upon the Lord
Sometimes they wander together over the blessed earth
He smiling and talking, she humble beneath a tree
Together they bless all living beings
Showing them which herbs to eat, which fruits from the tree
They're not ever the same, they're free
They point the way to the Lotus Feet
Soft and black like a cloud
They direct by misdirection
Lightning flashes around the bulbous head
Of Their generous son

Long gone's now the place, the grassy lawn beneath the tree
Where I forced myself into their company
Muzzla Molecules and a young girl of nimble mind
In those days when sages searched for African Kings and Nobles and Majesty

Shrouded by numbing mists of memory
And there beneath the spreading branches of the vanished tree
We sat upon the grass to inhale fumes of weed
When there came a man greying in years
Speaking swiftly in trader's tongue he came bearing his wares
In some strange good humour I parted with cash
For boxes of incense, destined for ash
And the man pointed to his wife beneath a distant tree
And we said "Let her come," the girl and me
But Muzzla fixed the man with a hard warding look
"He does not want me to stay, I saw his eye"
So had I
But Muzzla complied, and we pressed him to stay
His wife smiled softly as he began to say
Of the time when he once smoked the weed
Now he was free
He showed us how to pick fruits from the bush
Now the place has made way for concrete slabs and brick piles
Newtown's shifting display

XII

New year blossoms Spring
New Yellow sunlight morning bathing
Night is for jumping and dance
Day is night for Yellow dreams waking
The shades of fresh green are infinite
Brick buildings in Trade Town are glistening

Rasta carries no umbrella, he walks or jumps in the rain
“Mr D comes with the rain!” called Yellow-man and his queen
Water-logged Newtown at dusk where we gathered to pray
Our burning chalice
Seeking with blessed words to open ancient ways
“See the beard. This is King David!”
Muzzla of Joseph said
Of the portrait of Haile Selassie’s head

Josepha stands in a dream of ideas
Neither black nor white
But unified
Love

And he marched to the song
In Yellow-man’s house, and in the hall
Burning the night with fire and greeting the dawn
“No White love
“No Black love

“Not even Japanese love”

Burning the walls

Throughout the night we’d run

Jumping through the howling wind

Renewing with each run the inner breath

Massaging inner organs with the herb’s coursing life

In the still hours darkest before the sun

With upheld flag:

Red

Yellow

Green

Muzzla Molecules would run

In Summer’s hall

Or biting-cold Winters outdoors

With only whipping crackling flames

Burning hot or windswept cold, never steadily warm

Round about Rasta soldiers would march

While I dozed

XIII

With growing Faith came growing Fear
With the splendors of Zion came the shadow of Babylon
With the waking of loyalty came the seeds of betrayal
The shadow of Fear

The dread-locked man in the ragged white shirt
A souvenir printed with Great Britain's Imperial flag
"Rastafari!" he called, laughing with scorn
I answered "Jah!"
He stared in doubt and flickering confusion
I greeted him, and waited
He greeted, and mumbled:
"Whenever you smoke know that I'm there
"You do not smoke but through me"
He said he was Joseph, and that his colour was black
He said I was handsome
I thanked him and saw in his eyes a shifting emotion
He became somber and looked down, addressing somewhere below:
"You will buy us and you will sell us"
He looked in my eyes and pointed:
"Now you're becoming stupid!"
And he turned and walked briskly away
"He drinks whisky. He's a racist" I'm told by Muhlatsi the Youth
Who worked for a season in Yellow-man's booth
Then I see him again, the Rasta in rags
In a crazy dance in Newtown's square

White children playing tease him and run away
Staring in wonder, he is lost in the game
I seemed to know him when I looked in his eyes
His vision was clouded, dark clouds in the sky
What he saw did not matter, but was it true?
Sleeping dread awoken of future ruin
The fruit of not letting go
And yet I may see him by the cleansing water
For his heart is good
Praise God
Selah

XIV

“This is the Prince of Newtown”

I said to my friend who did not comprehend

“This is his kingdom”

And Prince laughed

“Prince of Newtown’s a monkey”

Dubbed the Prince to the rub-a-dub beat

“Prince of Newtown’s a monkey”

And all the ancient Rastas bounced upon their feet

Newtown was the Kingdom of her Prince

Laughing in high pitch with a shriek

He would come and go away

And come back again

Visiting the nurslings about Yellow-man’s stall

Turbaned Rastas and curious boys

Not even the ancient in the fullness of ghetto youth

Could guess his path, the ways he passed through

He passed, the Prince, by from a various age

Dark rough hands adorned with rings

He wrought, with silver bent spoons and forks

And he would sell them, through theatres he passed

And bars where white liberals would air

For he came from a time of political art, a living book of the past

In Newtown’s ferritted talking rooms

Now what’s left of the market in the square

Where artists would grace idle time with songs

Of forgotten truths remembered through ancient rhythm and speech
Where now's gone that brief flicker in Time and Space?

His laugh like a scream heard across the square
A patchwork of leather: The Prince of Newtown
Whose Kingdom is lost

“The Prince of Newtown's a monkey”

XV

*Now it came to pass as Judah came to the town
And there were gathered the prophets and kings
That a man approached from a country far
And his name remained silent, he was a man of Jah
And the man travelled never with an empty hand
But carried his works wrought of canvas and paint
And each painting was a moment frozen in time
Glowing yellow and brown, still and serene
So that your eye would linger long on every scene
This painter would wander the street
And bearing his work, each person would greet
Some would say "No thank you," without a glance
And truly Jahman needed no man's coin
He provided for others from his own
Upon meeting Judah upon the square
Smiling through the smoking air
The painter talked at length of the things he had learned
"I went not to school, but learned from the bin
"I come from the dustbin!" he would say with a laugh
His inner wisdom had taught him his craft
"I sat for a year without home or bed
"Burnt rubber for warmth, my skin was like lead
"And night after night through rubbish I would sift
"Bringing all the pieces together, until a picture would lift
"Hundreds of pictures would I tirelessly assemble
"Then blow them away, all gone forever*

“And in the bin would I find many secret things

“Of plans and rumour of stange tidings

“By piecing together notes and scraps

“I saw the secrets of men, their plans and their traps

“Devious ways I unfurled revealing the Truth”

Jahman took Judah and Josepha

Rolling the paintings, setting them in tubes

Slung over his shoulder the bazooka, they approached the lake near the zoo

Someone had spoken in the store

Whatever he said

Muzzla heard the word vibrating in his head

“Repatriation”

And I seemed to know what repatriation meant

“I will sleep not tonight, I have work to do”

He would work til the sun glinted upon the morning dew

They came to the painter’s place in the forest damp

Judah cooked the herbs of their meal, ochre fuzzed in a fuzzing pan

Then having eaten their holy meal

They walked to the studio down the hill

Jahman worked with petrol and brown paint

And light projected through prints of forgotten dreams

Now upon the canvas the light did gleam

The solemn face of a princess, a queen

Three locks of hair hung from her crown

She was painted in different shades of brown

Muzzla rested upon the ground from the day’s long march

*Though it was for him that the painter revealed his craft
He felt no fear in sharing the knowledge of works
But Muzzla was meant for another Fate
The painter lived plain, as a soldier of Jah
“The police wanted to search my hair
“for the herbs they supposed I had hidden there
“‘Why do you look in my hair? Look in the field’
“I know many things, I’m from the dustbin
“The law of oppression: it is a big thing”*

XVI

I came to the Rastas without beginning

And parted without ending

Chanted on bended knee

“Hailie Selassie I

“Jah!

“Rastafari!

“King Hailie Selassie I is the First

“Selah”

That time is like a vanished dream

Internally I am the same

The five fronded leaf-plant was the friend of an age

Enfolding my grief and blowing it away

The earthy taste of the clean soapy smoke

Upon the in-breath bursts a flower

To bloom in the soil of the brain

And delight in music and all crafts well made

In the blasphemy of youth was the herb a giddy delight

Thickening idolatory dreamt in waking at night

In the ignorance of taking causing a whirl of words

Vile or pleasing, insidious arrows into the heart sinking

Haunting the mind with solitary madness

Sundering from the world

A gaping emptiness, a weekend diversion

A medicine to cure the effects of boredom

A search in despair was awoken
A search for something, I knew not what
The search was all in the ocean of fear
But one who searches knows that the Truth is there
Invisible, intangible, eternally Free
Untouched by self-hating dreams
It gleams briefly
In a chime, a word, a gesture, a vanishing refrain
The remembered colour and movement in swirling clouds of paint
The bound, the almost gained flight
Floating in winds beyond the grasp of mind
And it is not touched, though forgotten in wild idolatory
Perversion of images, twisting of beauty
To accomplish the longed-for death of the body

XVII

Was I not once certain that praise of man was false?
Pointing to the bearded face upon the badge of Nostra D
Many years ago, at university I asked, “Who’s he?”
He worshipped a man as God?
He stood smiling in his belief

In those days we smoked mixed herb for the kick
No word uttered in prayer, merely tumbling thoughts
The Rastas moved us but to laugh and wink
Sunday dark danced alone on his spot
Years later I would take up the dance remembering the time past
And feeling hard the gaze of those who looked on
“Dan is the most liberal white I’ve ever met” he’d said
There amidst the university lawns
Strange dreams were woven with smoke and words
Snoop spoke of his living dreams
Shaping at will the patterns in the things that he sees
And there sat one whom none could know
For his riddled speech was filled with holes
He spoke of the burning fire where champagne glasses clink
The drinkers laughing oblivious of the great burning
But few of his mutterings could be guessed or heard
He offended the pious for he smiled as he prayed
With Chess Jahman we pondered and smoked by the hour, by the day
“Ben Laden!” He laughed, and “Ben Laden!” again
Chess Jahman was a Rasta for true

Unafraid of gaol, he took another's place

Gentle and laughing and strong in his faith

XVIII

“See the beard” Muzzla said

Of the noble features of the emblazoned head

“This is King David”

And I mis-laughed

Of Him they told:

The bird of folded paper shaped by His hands

Took wing in flight

He brought the symbol to life

In the forest alone he wandered, with animals at peace

Understanding their speech

With gentleness bringing them under command

And he grew to be a man, bringing diverse lands

Beneath the sovereign sway of His ancient crown

From all the world came nobles, leaders and kings

In glorification of the King of Kings

Hailie Selassie I

Jah Rastafari

Of I-tiopia the rightful king

With regal majesty he ruled, and righteousness grew

Little I knew of the ancient lore of His noble house

Of ancient baronies and lords and the tapestry of diplomacy

Which brought Him the Empery

It was all recorded on scattered leaves worn with reading

Received in rough hands by reclusive sages

He hailed from King Solomon

Much is the lore scattered in traveller's hands

Who can imagine it?

The land of ancient churches and kings

Of embroidered cloth and mountainous cities

Palaces of stone, windows of crystal

Lineages and sacraments

And distant wars in the hills?

Why credit it? Why believe?

Did I not feel forgiveness? Was I not made wholesome and clean?

What is impossible for God? Can He not come as He would?

In Imperial garb of a Kingdom steeped in Time

Or playing the flute?

Many, many times has He come, so I read in the Book

Of the Song of God and in the teachings of Srila Prabhupada

But now I speak of another strand of Faith

Which in time would cleave my heart

Pulled in two ways

So many strands are woven into this moment

By gradual revolutions and countless interlocking events

XIX

Oaths are taken, and then they are broken
I stand mournfully in the rain, forgiven
The time was with the Winter solstice
I saw it as the end, it is the beginning
War is being waged
All the earth dismayed
Led in illusion, forgetting those flashes
Paranoia?
War is being waged
We are gluttoned and bloody, so we wobble and sway
Mock, jeer and defame
If we could hold precious Krishna in our hands
We would only hate Him and crush Him, or try
Turning to gorge on rotting flesh
Worshipping those who suck on fresher blood, our own
War is being waged
Swuffle of shirt
“Play the game!”

XX

I touched Yellow by the arm and pointed to the burnished sky

Glowing like bronze with the blossom of day's dying fire

There in serried file

Line after line

In a floating V

Birds long-winged fly South, a prophecy

"They're marching in knowledge"

Muzzla said

"We're small to them"

When the sky was made purple and blue in the gloam of night

The stars glowing white shed faint light upon the journeying knight

His skin was dark, his voice soft

A beard slight traced his face anciently carved

Like a gazelle

Crouched in the rustle of Yellow-man's wares

And the blazing chalice and smoke of herbs

There was a sharing of ancient wisdom and lore

The living pulse of the living Lord

I-Key had travelled from a distant land

Greater Zimbabwe

"Great Britain – Greater Zimbabwe"

"Greatest I-tiopia"

From him was I destined to learn

The foundation: Rise before the sun

Before the world wakes the most important work is done

There beneath the glistening lamps on the square
He opened his book revealing traces of vanished Time
Nurtured in the heart of the Rastaman
A land of green hills and cragging cliffs
Of forests and falls
And temples hewn of living mountain and stone
Of houses like mounds with round windows and turf
Where hidden in the open simplicity of a humble church
Because open and unadorned, unregarded by the world
The Holy Arc of the Covenant

Silent the ritual
Billowing smoke in the air
Quietly spoken the morning prayer
Ere the rising of the sun
Our work is begun

XXI

I-an-I

Will never look no back

No I-an-I

Will never look no back

I-an-I

Will never look no back

I will never look behind

XXII

“Jah!”

Called Muzzla

With a burst of smoky plumes

Raising his head with a shout to the moon

“They hear me there too”

Who will hear the man in the empty square?

With his scrap of paper and his pen

Numbers unfolded from numbers and words

Opening the doors to the eternal world

A science of Cush

The secret of Newtown was hidden under ground

For Muzzla could read the signs lost in Time

Now a towering red building with mirrored windows stands

Where rails of vanished trolley trams stretched into empty space

We stood on the platform where men no longer wait

The sunlight rushing away

Grass dancing with their shadows

Dust and worn scraps kicking with colour

The curved roof of tin held by curved steel beams

Air, or space filling the angles and gaps

Shapes in the latticed embrasures: A teaching of Cush

Rises from the river of time

“God is boring”

Said Molecules with a laugh

He sees who's still

"I stop eternal"

We drank water from the Cush

"One plus one is one" he said

"And one minus one is one"

A secret from hereafter

In false learning I thought of multiplication and division

We heard who shared not his vision

XXIII

What is that Babylon which we burn with smoke and prayer?

The mad rush of city life, our mad desires, our fears

From concourse of smoke arriving home alone

I felt muscle and bone driven by a will not my own

For how else with safety could I find my way

While pedalling the car through city lights at night?

What an aspect everything had:

Books, papers, and coins

CDs, records, and all that

As if carefully placed

Toys in the maze to please the rat

Someone has been here

Searching and replacing

Taking notes

And wandering silently

Watching

Brown cockroach

Here alone I would solemn ritual enact

Lighting candle and cushion, sanctifying a small space

Amidst a gathering host

Crowding with eager greed upon the oily smoke

And sleep fell upon me, lewd dreams numbed

Benumbed too I woke

And it came to pass when the three came together

In the light of prayer and blessed smoke
They observed in the distance a woman
Spying them through a lense
Capturing their images
And Judah was swiftly apprehensive,
And desirous to know her hidden purpose, or the end
To which the image of him with blazing chalice at his lips would serve
But Josepha answered:
“It’s not right. You’re supposed to ask. We are people. You don’t just shoot.”
And he turned his mind to ephemeral things
Issachar regarded it lightly and talked of great deeds
But Judah dwelt upon it

It becomes disturbing and strange to follow two ways
Kneeling to the Cush; and then chanting the Holy Names
Upon such a day I knelt before my altar to blaze the flame
And supped somehow different, for when I raised my face
I was seen by Krishna, and I knew I was naked
And I heard the same question again:
“Who told you you were naked?”
For I had tasted the forbidden fruit
Of the tree of knowledge of evil and good

“This is also Ganja”
Muzzla said
Pointing at my wooden chanting beads

XXIV

“Time’s a long rope,” said I-Key to me
Whom Yellow-man called the man of Bhingi
“And death’s a small judgement,” said he that night
“For those who pass through the greater judgement of life”

Dark brown man clothed in a rainbow of light
Carrying his locks in holy cloth, uncovered at times
Sat at table with slowly burning joint
Rings of
Red
Yellow
Green

Talking of things of value, the teachings of Life
“I rise with the stars when all are asleep
“I rise the sun, wake the day, compose myself to pray
“The later you wake the more tired you become
“I wake the day, and rise the sun”
He sat outside and looked at the star
That is never seen by those who sleep
“I wake when eye opens” said he
“Why else should it open?”

And he spoke of passing through, of Jah revealing the way
“Mengistu, Mugabe’s ward, lives on charity
“And the broken shards of dreams
“Though he tried, Selassie I never died

“He passed through
“To live in the heart of every Rasta”
Now the wasted lion takes the scraps of the servant
Even he the Rastas praise
The stone that the builder refused

“Jah Jah Rastafari teaches I how to pass through
“Death’s the door the hole I reeve”
So said he who had reached the top, I-Key
“Live in the heart, not in the mind
“The mind can be colonised
“But never the heart
“Sunday is the first day of the Strong
“Seven days long
“And work begins on day number one
“But I have learnt that everyday we must work
“If you do not work it means you are broken
“Liberia and Marcus Garvey were sabotaged for rubber
“I do not fall asleep, I do not fall
“Nor do I sleep too sweet
“I sit on the chair, or lie on the floor
“I rest but I do not sleep
“We are a movement, not a stagnant
“Therefore we move
“In a spacious house you don’t stay in one room
“Egypt is my garden, Nigeria my kitchen
“Ethiopia my workshop
“The cushu was a fruit

“It is still a fruit

“Sometimes we add strength to draw strength

“In Zion we sing and chant and dance”

XXV

When Jah Rastafari get ready, we mafee move

We mafee move

We mafee move

We mafee moove

We mafee moo-oo-oove

When Jah Rastafari get ready, we mafee move

XXVI

When will we sit and talk of Marcus Garvey

He who came before?

He heralded the king, taught the majesty of works

Repatriation

XXVII

Muzzla! Recall the day I offered thee a fruit
My hand withdrawing, it slipped from my grip
And danced in the air as I fumbled and groped
The naartjie frail with orange segments
How many lifetimes of toil passed with each furtive bounce
Universes created and destroyed
Before catching hold at last the offering was made?
That day a youth passed by looking for his mate
And you blessed him to find her
When we saw them together in each other absorbed
I turned to you, fulfilled was your word

Who will listen to the man in the square?
A flag bedecked tree folded over the chair
“Sabbatta is for the fast, trust Muzzla!”
He held a Cush near his head
“Because they run to the grave the people go dead”
Running from Truth
Running from Joy
“Selassie told I He will stop them from running to the grave!”

“Tune me a guitar Judah!”
And he played and sang away
A hundred thousand songs
Recorded in ether waves

“Hitler was an artist, but he moved from his spot”

And he jumped on the spot

XXVIII

The mountain is holy where we are free
To build the fire, to cook, pray, and eat
Muzzla gave me a potato coal-coated
To make me clean

And then I thought of taking them to the king of all mountains
Towering above monstrous peaks
Like Titans' bones crashed
When hurled down
Cracking stone and deep valleys
Cooled by long shadows of years
Vast dragons lurk grown hugely in the mist
I remembered lying flat proned on an awkward slant
Tilting over nothingness
I laughed and cried with the shocking thrill
Of the vast expanse and dizzying height
Above the dragon's thin ridged spine curved threateningly below
Even that towered over the land
And great condors, great birds floated over the perilous space
Clear waters plummeted
And plummeted
Long splashing over ages to the distant valley below
And behind a massive boulder, split by the roots of a tree
Where dappled shadows danced as in a pool, brown and leafy
Or in a rocky gully filled with yellow mountain flowers
Would we send billows of smoke up in the air with song and prayers

And glance during the dark night hours at circling stars in immenseness
Faint speckles of star clouds urging awe at time-stretched distances
Mystical words unknown would flutter between us and the sky
So I dreamed as we drove, Muzzla, Yellow and I
And the second queen of Yellow and his child

“All the city is just a dot” said Muzzla
As we drove through the country

We stopped first at a small town, the home of Muzzla’s early years
And came to the house of the working man who tended them
Now with different language, mind, garb and name
Stood Muzzla Molecules, gaunt and tall, turban wrapped hair
Rough shod, having trod a prophet’s way
Through homeless streets and dark to hidden recluses of flame
And amidst the strange people of the holy fire
Muzzla stood alone to offer aloud his prayer:

“Holy Emmanuel I

“Selassie I

“Jah!

“Rastafari!

“King Hailie Selassie I is the First

“Selah!

“Our Father

“Who dwelleth in-a Holy Mount Zion

“Hallowed be Thy Name

“Thy Kingdom come

“Thy will be done

“On earth
“As it is in-a Holy Mount Zion
“Give I-an-I this day
“Our daily bread
“And Forgive I-an-I our tresp-I
“As we forgive I-an-I who tresp-I again I
“And lead I-an-I not into temptation
“But deliver I-an-I from the hand of the wicked one
“For thine is the Majesty
“The Power
“And the Glory
“For Ever and Ever
“Selah”

In the morning’s chill we stood at mountain’s foot
Sky slate grey
Tall tufts of grassy stalks wet with dew
Beginning toilsome strides bearing a heavy sack of wood
The path was laid to take the traveller abroad
First by long zigzags up the slope
Then hugging cliffs that distant valleys overlook
Round great boulders through tumbles of stone
Up a chain stair to the cold barren top
And crisp pure air
But path and travellers parted that day
In the chill grey
The great sack with its burden pulled us down with its weight
Casting aside bundles and bundles of wood

Woman and child grown weary
Muzzla and Yellow would make camp where we stood
All stood forlorn, Muzzla complained
“It is not that because we came to the mountain we must climb to the top”
Yellow agreed, they wanted to stop
So we left the path and encamped on a slope
In tall tufts of tough grass set the tent and prepared to smoke

The great heights of the mountain and its terrible towers
All cloaked in thick mist
Bedewing the grass, soaking the flame with its kiss
Then dropt in an inquisitive troop
The women and children of furry mountain baboons
I remembered the rough bark in the valley of trickling trees
The mountain is the home of the rough shaggy beast
Teeth like knives, eyes jealous with fury
Bristling mane tumbles down slopes with frightening speed
“We must leave!”
Upon the movement, the retreat
The baboons looked
Sat upon tumbled stones

Divided by quarrel we were driven from the slopes
Rolled down past abandoned faggots of wood
Through tumbling clouds and rough barks in the gloom
And meeting two travellers light-footed with well-ordered gear
On their way to the top with a favouring wind and a path clear
To lie beneath a blue night, star-laden above the cloud’s sear

“Fear not the baboon,” said they lightly, “and they will never cause fear”

At base station defeated in a thick wet mist
Making the fire grow dim, the dough soggy and wet
Yellow-man baked with face set and grim
Muzzla took the cush “making all problems grow small”
They would return to the city that very night
We tried
But behind the wheel I grew ever so tired
Stopped on the road-side, sleep winning the fight

And we stopped the next day at the town of Muzzla’s youth
Where he danced and chanted three hours long
All silently watched knowing not what to do
He was burning Babylon alone
Muzzla Molecules
Upon the day long ago died the girl
He once knew

XXIX

We read a holy psalm beneath the light of a flame

I realized and spoke:

“Our suffering’s the same.”

And he cried

Knowing it was true

Muzzla Molecules

Rasta goes to no funeral, but to his mother’s house we came

Appearing like flags upraised in a mourning place

Like a prophecy from the rain

The ancient face of motherhood sorrow worn

Muzzla gave the food to my craving worm

With a carved potato to carry the flame

We sat then alone up above the house

A rippling desert of rooftops rolling over Soweto’s plain

“I knew here much sorrow”

Tears mingled with the rain

Then we went away, coming to a wall

Where kneeled youths with burning grass

“Fire youths! Ghettoe youths!”

Cried Muzzla Molecules

Causing the waters to bubble with leaping flame

“This is for strict vegetarians!” he said passing the Cush

I smoked past surfeit and became sick by the road

“It’s because of your Chinese food”

We came then to a house where I fell on the bed

Rising with the sun

Muzzla still dancing in the Church of Melchizedek

XXX

Bonds of alliance, a shelter of chains
Against the vast ocean of life with its vast crushing waves
Are forged with sacrificial blood

The Rastaman drew his sword to slay
The clouds towered high, burnished pink after rain
In me, my white skin
He saw his enemy

What does it mean that I am called white?
“I am not black, you are not white
“Check out the skin: It’s all brown, dark or light
“All men are brown, brown like the earth
“Trust Muzzla
“Keep the Sabbath fast”

Death’s but the door, so said the book
To the mountain Kingdom, the halls of the Kings
The halls of the Kings
The halls of the Kings
Where I stood conquered by sleep
“This is our prayer”
But I did not listen, seeing them dance in sacred lines
Feet marching in sacred step of riddim in dance
Night to dawn
For the pleasure of the King

The ghetto youth looked at me with anger and doubt
Hour after hour I felt his confused, unbroken gaze
Screwing up more angrily as we caused the chalice to blaze
“This is our wine,” and we smoked
Yet still I felt the gaze
And the night wore on until the break of day
When he accosted me with prophetic words twisted and strange
Of going to gaol
And King Yellow who heard
Merely looked
Noticed
And turned away.

XXXI

Our suffering was the same
The pain of having failed, of having betrayed
Of seeing stars glisten like yellow flowers in the sky
Or the heroic clouds far away lit gold in the East by the sun that sets
And we are far away, numbed, made dumb by the weight of our sins

“Fire burn!” Muzzla cried
Passing the boy on night’s street
In fear glancing; in lust; in greed
Waiting

Then in day’s billowing smoke revealing a secret:
“What say you of Sizzla Kalonji?” she asked
“Respect to Sizzla. What he says is right.”
“What do you say of *chi-chi* man?” she goaded
The young girl in my car
The white smoke filling our lungs
He looked at us in confidential disclosure
“They are right,” he replied
“Trust Muzzla”

XXXII

Muzzla was not less the Saint

For the falling away

And coming back again

One day Yellow frowned beneath the hanging cloths of his shop

His phone had gone missing, and Muzzla was gone

“Friends come and go,” said Yellow

Some days passed, and I saw Muzzla again

But he spoke strange, as if to say “we are all God”

And for a time he prayed “King Hailie Selassie the First”

Something was missing

But he came back again

Like a Rasta

In his bouncing he’s free

Free to jump in the sun and the rain

Free of judgement dealt in

Or judgement claimed

Is it not the eye which is enslaved

Which marks the shifting glance in others

Upon the flesh of a fleeting display?

That was a crooked day

A young girl in the assembly of Rastas

Seeming to enjoy the captured glance

And I, despised for more than being white

Being neither of Rasta, nor of Krishna

And avoiding the home which I held as a dim corner of the mind
Went later, quite stoned, to the working lunch
And sought in unwelcome familiarity, a measure of disguise

And towards the end, came the woman in red
With mature brown locks
That glimpse of ferocious beauty
Was enough to make me run away
In my heart of hearts still the slave of imagery

XXXIII

I remembered Muzzla again in the pain of sin
He walked with bare feet on Winter's streets
Leading a young girl, buying her roasted meats
But together he and I honoured our meal of herbs
And as the girl slept for a while content
We caused the Cushu to burn

It was enough to kneel huddled around the flame
With darkness gathered thickly
And wavering light upon the page
As we clung to our prayer and the bubbling Cush
Making internal organs chocolate rumbling

The girl had run away, from a place in the country far away
Now wandering in the city
But Muzzla found her and hid her in secret places
Such were his shelters on the streets for the lamb astray
With the holy prophet of the South she was safe

The time came for her to return home
And she gave him her chain of silver
To wear for twelve years, then to give another
And when she had gone
Muzzla walked without the chain

XXXIV

Shall I ever see again or hear the forest search and refrain
More real than waking?
And, upon waking how the song echoed again
But when I woke to grasp it, it slipped away
Like grains of sand
So I fell back to sleep befouled
Soft seductive blank

The King who dies not, who never grows old
When the unknown plunges us into grief and fear
By the shadow caused by the burning light behind
No matter our hatred, our turning, He is ever near
Unknown to all the world
Its eternal master and King
And He has walked as a man amongst the living!
So says the book
So says Rasta
Why believe?
Because they march their prayer to all night song
And see with waking eye the rising of the sun
When others sleep they are awake
And the King is known only to those who sing His praise
Though they come from the bin
We are His servants and as such we're the same
For we die not and are not meant for the grave
So say Muzzla and I-Key and Yellow: The limited circle of the flame

There was a fourth, Nathi his name

XXXV

Muzzla Molecules ran far and free
On the grass in the sun, the wind and the rain
Beneath the tree jumping to the rub-a-dub beat
I could hardly move in an overcoat stuffed
with burdens weighed down

I smoked ever sadly after awaking though dimly
To the Holy Name
For now it was but naked greed
Urged on by the sight, the smell of the weed
Eager to grasp at my turn
Amongst those who did not have to wait
For it came
It came while their minds danced in the flames
I looked then to Muzzla
Begging forgiveness over the hallowed flame
And he knew in his prayer what I meant
Forgiveness in his look

XXXVI

Muzzla the child saw the Hare Krishnas in Soweto

Before any other white person would come

Singing, dancing and playing drums

Jah!

Rastafari!

King Hailie Selassi I is Almighty God

Selah

Rejoice O children of Israel in the glory of our prophets

May we ever thank the Lord and His beloved and ever-loving servants

Rejoice in their songs of praise!

Rejoice in their works!

Rejoice in Jah!

Rastafari!

King Hailie Selassie I is Almighty God

Selah

Behold children of Jah Rastafari, all glory be unto His Name

Oh Bleck God

Ever living life of your everlasting beloved

Your prophets are your triumphant flag and conch

Flower and flame

Which burn throughout the night and day

They bring with them love and healing for all nations

They bring joy to I-an-I soul

O Holy name

Eternal Rest

hare krishna hare krishna krishna krishna hare hare

hare rama hare rama rama rama hare hare

All remembrance and forgetting are under Your influence

May I crave no fame: I write to remember

I may have gone to Your blessed temple that day

But I came instead to Alexandra town

With its men and women and children

Its dense humanity

And eyes were everywhere

Above

Below

All around in the holes in the walls

The Rastaman sings and dances for Your pleasure

To uplift the ghetto youth

Men, women and children

They bring healing to a wounded bleeding nation

“Krishna is a humble youth”

Said Muzzla Molecules

The Ghetto youth

XXXVII

Of Cushum Ben Lord, what they say is true

The herb is a healer

Good for bones, blood, heart and liver

A combination of five elements: Earth, air, fire, ether and water

By our faith, through this, we may live forever

There is no end to the teachings he unfolds

And now his teaching is this: "Stop smoking ganja!"

I do not know why, but this is her teaching

Because I said I would

Because I have already lied

Because I was impatient to satisfy the urgent cry

Because I was late

Because I concealed

Because I was naked

Because I was afraid

Because Krishna says He will show me the way

To please Prabhupada

I tried and failed

And blamed the Lord for the bleakness of life

Where to Lord? Where to now?

Now I will bless the Cush

And pray for the healing of the nation

The healing herb

The Holy fire

Oh blessed Cushum Burn

Oh blessed Cushum Bun

Oh blessed Cushum Ben

Ben dem

Bless

Ben dem

Bless

Bea dem

Blees

Bless

Ja-a-a-ah

Bastafarih

Selah

Jah

Rastafari

King Heilie Selassi I is the

First

Selah

Let word match deed, and deed follow word

Give up the herb

Let not this attachment pull you on a tangent

Give up the herb

You are going to be tested

When you give up the herb

Chant Hare Krishna

And give up the herb

A new life is before you

So give up the herb

Follow His deer Lotus Footsteps

And give up the herb

XXXVIII

I smoked ganja with Nathi but he carried the herb
He lived in alone far from the conflicting worlds
Gathering the news that drifted to his shore
And we could speak of them all as we smoked and of the things we had heard
Krishna, devotees, the material world
Demons and saints
Rastas and Freemasons
Muslims, Christians and Jews
Christ and Prabhupada
His Imperial Majesty Emperor Hailie Selassie
God
The best way to be? To follow our feet
To search
To worship and pray to God
To respect and honour his devotee
And we disagreed
About attaining perfection as a human being
About something difficult to define
God
Everyone is different
We should practice more than preach
Is Hailie Selassie God?
I have said so before
A mantra I learnt from Muzzla Molecules
Have I idolised him?
Imitated rather than followed?

He illuminates the instruction my own heart imparts
The Rastas are devotees of King Hailie Selassie
Can I say they are right or wrong?
I chant His name when I smoke the herb, as I learned
Making it a sacrament
Which I have to leave behind

Jah!
Rastafari!
King Hailie Selassie I is the First
Selah

And as I came to the end of that time
The curtain being drawn
I was led to the Rasta church of an order strange
Unlike the Rastas, or the Bobos, who danced freely in the hall, or in the rain
It was the church of Melchizedek with its tabernacle clean
A bowl of fruits offered unto the King
And I spoke with Abbamanafesgeddoes
Ever taking money
Ever ravished by poverty
Yet he had something to teach
Of the King who washes His servants' feet
Red is three
Yellow is two
Green is one

XXXIX

I could not, did not smoke Ganja, but after a rub-a-dub prayer

Rastaman called me

I bowed at his feet

“You are humble. You’re a general” he said, “Pray with me

“In the early morning, in the morning a Prayer

““Oh Allah the Great!””

Then:

“I pray for a flu,” he said

“Why?”

He would not say, waiting for me to overstand

XL

A moment passed me by in our taxi ride
Coming from the court it passed me by
“Never lose your spirit,” Muzzla said
Oh Lord, may I never lose my spirit!

Muzzla Molecules at the magistrate’s court in Alexandra town
With some others, in different drabs and colours
Tried for squatting in the government house
“Why are you looking at me? Don’t look at me!”
The prosecutor scowled
“Sorry general,” said Muzzla
His head in the clouds
When it was heard the squatters were arrested and gaoled without notice
The prosecutor looked down, the detective embarrassed

And I followed Muzzla like a deer, slim ankles through the stalks
Grass brushing the pathway to the neat houses the government had built
“These were meant for the Rastas, but they were taken by ZCC”
I had heard in court: the contractor pushed the police

Home for I was where Rasta-I dwelt
Amidst the colours of the rainbow and music and ganja smoke
Jah Jah city was my home
Wood at our feet, stone above and below
Then Muzzla took me to a stone house in the veldt
Standing tall like a castle

Each stone carefully found and assembled
And atop the roof building sat a Rastaman smiling
Locks on his back in a field of grass in Alex town
“Come for ganja tea when my house is built”
I knew I would not
Then we came to the shacks where the Rastas still lived
Dolla-I the poet, who wore Khaki and carried a stick in his hand
Lived in a shed beneath thorn trees in the veldt
Yellow and green

XLI

The suffusion of light yellow when I opened the door
Glowed like a crystal in the sun
And in the centre the light resolved
Into a slender brown wand
Brown like wood, like a slender carved man
He looked at me gently and softly
“I can stand here all day”

I-Key reached the furthest point, the top
Cape Town, when his body had cried to go to Zimbabwe, to home
“Now no journey is too difficult, all other points have been passed”
He pushed forward and reached the highest spot
From which he could view everything as from above
“Jah comes to us when we’re tired, therefore we push the extra mile
“Work the extra hours
“It is only when we suffer defeat that we can be rescued by Jah
“The father rewards the son with the fruit of his toil”

And he spoke of his journey back down to the city
“The truck driver pinched the ganja, the ganja my shield
“Placed between us on purpose, to capture his gaze
“Because his eye was on the ganja, I knew I was safe”
And I thought of my longing to make the ganja blaze

“Open bottle belongs to cockroach
“Attachment pulls us behind

“When you get what you want you go nowhere
“And when we let go we make the space for something better to come
“I do not close the gap when I drive
“I go to sleep fighting, I say:
““The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”
“Winter is the season of the strong
“People are afraid of Winter, so it cannot be weak
“Winter keeps your fresh, like a fridge”

Oh Lord
How gently you woke me
Wind chiming bell
To stay in bed is a comforting hell
Crawling back in
How I missed the chill moon wind

The day came when Nathi and I-Key sat at table
To share ancient their knowledge of the Rasta way
Nathi feared it had been seen, his tall evergreen
Growing like a tree behind the shack
“You have been warned from within”

Then came the day when I saw I-Key again
Locks shorn, face sombre, he had come from his home
Wife and child and familial bands
Held him down
“It was my locks or my limbs”
Time was beginning to pull us away

Now I remember his sad glance with the words

“It’s a vow of separation”

The locks had been shorn

“Cherish life

“Life is to be cherished like a sacred flame”

XLII

I remembered him again, towards the end
Muzzla Molecules, free of judgement
He, could he see me now
Would look past my sin and my shame
Knowing well of striving, of falling, of getting up again
My greatest sin at his feet came at the end
At an empty house where we smoked, and feeling my sin
I spoke dogmatic words
An institutional cant

“We will just go to the park and be”
He said one day, inviting me
With his companioned friends
No fear
No judgement
Just smoking and being like the birds who are free
But I could not go
For I was not free

XLIII

Being pulled by our ways

All I can do is to glance

At the king in rags, a knight errant

His bare chest like bronze in Winter's setting sun ablaze

Burnished by dust and time

Feet bundled in rags, a worn staff in his hand

A vagrant

A bum

In our house of cards

I saw a prince pulling a trash trolley one day

Jah!

Rastafari!

King Hailie Selassie I is the First

Selah