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Condoleezza Rice's Piano by Sa'dī Yūsuf

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Hey, ho Bob Marley
O Bob Marley
How do we stop that train?
Stop the train!
How do we?
You don't know that calm woman at the piano,
Sure she's black,
But hey man, she's not the nice one you dreamt of, Nina Simone.
O Nina Simone!
This calm woman at the piano,
She wasn't around during your time.
(That's Condoleezza Rice)
As for the keys, I mean the ones you might think are piano keys,
Well, they're the gates to the kingdom of Hell.
Hey, ho Bob Marley
O Bob Marley
Hey my friend
Hey long-time friend
Hey friend who's got songs about a continent of dreams,
Love,
And the prime of life,
You won't see that lady with your own two eyes.
You won't see how her keys come with horrifying angels,
Or how she opens the gates of her dreams to hellhounds.
You won't witness the storm fold up the skies of Baghdad like me.
O Bob Marley.

London 11/18/2004

Commentary

The poetic structure of Sa‘dī Yūsuf’s *Condoleezza Rice’s Piano*, a brazen response to the carnage that followed the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, brings to mind the defiance of early punk rock anthems. Here, I have attempted to intertextually evoke the rebelliousness of that genre by making reference to the line “Hey! Ho! Let’s go!” from the Ramones’ 1976 single “The Blitzkrieg Bop.” Yūsuf’s percussive, chopped verse bursts out onto the page somewhere between the spoken word of the Beat Generation and a three-chord progression blasting through a 1980s underground basement club. While the poet’s mention of Bob Marley and Nina Simone is explicit, I have worked to further situate his verse in a musical sphere already familiar to English-language audiences—one purposefully stripped of pretense and aimed directly against the exercise of oppressive power.