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"Glory is a Passing Thing": William Grant Still and Langston Hughes Collaborate on *Troubled Island*

William Grant Still and Langston Hughes worked together to create most of the *Troubled Island* libretto over a period of about six weeks in the spring of 1938.[1] They brought their strong interest in the subject and their separate technical skills and experience to the project, in addition to their individual aesthetic approaches, working styles, politics, and personalities. Their subject was the late eighteenth-century slave rebellion in Haiti and the role of Jean Jacques Dessalines in the revolution that followed. In Hughes's words (as provided for the production later on) it "concerns a brief period in the thrilling and turbulent history of the tropical island of Haiti. Its theme is the search for human freedom, and the tragic gulf that history usually records between aspiration and achievement."[2] Thus Hughes's framework for the opera deals with Dessalines as organizer and leader of the revolt, his megalomania as emperor, and his ultimate betrayal and assassination by his lieutenants. Azelia, his slave wife at the opening of the opera, is discarded after he becomes emperor; she returns as his primary mourner at the end. Refining this outline as they worked, both Hughes and Still added numerous touches. In particular they gave greater prominence to a romantic triangle involving Dessalines, one of his lieutenants (Vuval), and a mulatta of the court (Claire Heureuse), which had the effect of modifying Hughes's framework.

The outline from which they worked was a ten-page synopsis prepared before the fact by Hughes, which survives, and the text of Hughes's play on the same subject as produced a year and a half earlier, which is unlocated.[3] In this paper, I track the development of the libretto from Hughes's synopsis, pointing out the changes they worked out, raising some questions about some seemingly unresolved disagreements between them, and making a few comments about the musical setting that resulted. Because they worked face to face, there is almost no written record of the collaboration, so parts of my discussion must remain speculative. The most glar-

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ing gap in the sources available for this project is the absence of early versions of Hughes's play. Even the original title, "Drums of Haiti," as it was referred to in a letter from Arna Bontemps to Hughes had already been changed to "Emperor of Haiti" by the time Hughes's play received its first production (at Karamu House, Cleveland, in 1936).[4] "Emperor of Haiti" was its name in the earliest surviving draft of his story, the synopsis that Hughes prepared later that year for Still. "Emperor of Haiti" was the title under which Hughes's play on the same subject, with some key changes from the libretto, was published in 1963, a quarter century after their collaboration and fourteen years after the opera was produced. I am interested here in the development of the libretto and any issues arising from the Still-Hughes interaction that would be significant for a revival of the opera. I will therefore avoid discussing the personal differences that emerged between Hughes and Still after the opera was complete, as the production grew nearer. Their political differences are more germane to the subject, and these will be addressed as issues that arose as the pair worked on shaping the libretto.[5]

Hughes apparently left Los Angeles before they had jointly worked out the details about the opera's ending, or, at least, before he had supplied all the lines that would realize what they presumably had agreed on. I suspect that a lack of agreement on the ending and some other points may be among the reasons why Hughes left the libretto unfinished in 1938. Impatience with the slow speed at which they worked, the manner in which they worked, or Still's admittedly stiff requirements for his librettists, whom he wanted available as he composed, may also have been factors and should not be ruled out. Rampersad comments, "although he admired Still as a musician, Langston began to find him too imperious as a collaborator. Any disagreement between librettist and composer invariably had to be resolved in Still's favor." The remark is tempered, however, by his addition that this was a working hazard for a librettist, "an attitude Hughes would encounter and deplore in almost all the composers with whom he worked."[6]

In any case, Hughes continued to leave the matter open by not responding to repeated requests for the missing lines. (Eventually Verna Arvey supplied them, presently a sore point.) Whatever they agreed on or left hanging, neither Hughes nor Still was entirely satisfied with the ending as performed in the 1949 production. In addition to the changes from Hughes's outline to the finished libretto, each one tinkered with the ending, giving us two unrelated post-production alternatives and four variants in all. These variants raise the questions, how best to tie Dessalines's assassination to the main themes of the opera, and what means work best within the drama to achieve that goal.

* * *

Although the disagreements between Still and Hughes tend to get top billing in discussions about their professional relationship, it is important

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to consider what bound the two men together. Each was a highly educated member of Du Bois's "talented tenth" of the African American population with a continuing interest in drama. Each was considered preeminent in his specialty among the creative artists to emerge in the years of the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes's first volume of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, appeared in 1926, a year after Still heard the first performance in New York City of one of his concert works, *From the Land of Dreams*. (Hughes had already published numerous poems separately by then, and Still already had many commercial arrangements to his credit.) Each brought a long commitment to the blues and to the cultures of the African diaspora outside the United States as well as within it. Both were committed to representing these cultures in new ways that escaped or transformed the old, demeaning stereotypes.[7] The idea of representing the successful rebellion in Haiti that permanently ended slavery there—the first such rebellion in the New World—was powerfully appealing to both. In the volatile political climate of the late 1930s, at a time when the national will to end the most vicious practices of racial segregation was not yet fully formed, an operatic setting of this story would constitute both a novelty and, more important, a major political statement. That point is recognized in the November 1936 letter from Arna Bontemps to Hughes quoted earlier: "*Drums of Haiti* is thrilling. The ending of the first act is masterful in my estimation. Most of the play, of course, presents Negroes in a mood unfamiliar to usual stage productions ..."[8] Neither man shied away from the challenge.

Haiti had captured Hughes's imagination from an early age, partly because his grandfather had been an official representative of the United States government to Haiti. By his own account, his initial sketches for a play on Jean Jacques Dessalines, one of the heroes of the Haitian revolution, date back to late 1928.[9] By the time he got back to it, he had passed several months on the island. In addition, he had several other plays under his belt. *Mulatto* opened at the Vanderbilt Theatre in October 1935; early in 1936 Karamu House had produced *Little Ham* and *When the Jack Hollers*, the latter written with Arna Bontemps. For *Emperor of Haiti*, Hughes said he had first conceived of a "singing play" which was to have the musically and politically prominent singer Paul Robeson as the hero and Clarence Cameron White as the composer. But when he returned to the project, White had found another librettist for his projected opera and Robeson, apparently, was neither interested nor available. His play was produced in 1936 by the Gilpin Players at Karamu House in Cleveland. Later the same year it appeared in Detroit under the title *Drums of Haiti*. Because Hughes understood that Still was more interested in opera than in a "singing play," Still was his second choice to compose his lyrics. Earlier, Still had set two of his poems, and Hughes had been critical of his setting of "Breath of a Rose" as too formal and difficult to sing. Nevertheless, Hughes's eagerness to pursue the project overcame his reluctance, leading him to approach Still, who was immediately interested.

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For his part, Still, though he never traveled outside the United States except during his naval service in World War I, had already sought "authentic" musical materials for two ballets, *La Guiablesse*, set in Martinique, and *Sahdji*, set in Africa, and had completed a major symphonic suite, *Africa*, intended as an Afro-American view of that continent. The theme of the revolution in Haiti thus conformed to one of his major compositional paths. Moreover, Still had been interested in composing operas at least from his teens in Little Rock, Arkansas, when his imagination had first been fired by hearing Victor Red Seal recordings of well-known Italian operatic arias. In New York, after he had gained broad experience in commercial theater and had several successes as a composer of symphonic music, he looked hard to find librettists and librettos. His first wife, Grace Bundy, had worked on a novel (tentatively titled *Rashana*) that was to become the subject of an opera, and Countee Cullen had agreed to write a libretto for Still at one point.[10] A ballet project with Katherine Dunham had likewise fallen through.[11] Still used part of a 1935 Guggenheim fellowship to compose an opera, *Blue Steel*, based on a short story by Carlton Moss about bayou dwellers in Louisiana, to a libretto prepared for him by Harold Bruce Forsythe. He was ready to try another when Hughes's proposal came along.

That there were also contentious issues between Still and Hughes was clear from the start. C. James Trotman refers to "their genuine and unconcealed philosophical differences" and viewed Still as holding moderate to conservative views about racial issues—in sharp contrast to Hughes's more radical stance—a not unreasonable assessment.[12] Still probably never shared Hughes's generally leftist leanings. At the time of their collaboration he was not so politically involved as Hughes, but he moved far to the political right in later years, certainly by the time of the 1949 production. Moreover, Still's interest in writing concert music appears at first glance to diverge from Hughes's interest in vernacular poetic forms. In fact the two men both drew heavily on their common racial heritage for aesthetic inspiration, breaking new ground as they went. If many of Hughes's titles before this collaboration betray this source (*The Weary Blues*, *The Negro Mother*, *Scottsboro Limited*, *Popo and Fina: Children of Haiti*, *A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia*, *The Ways of White Folks*), consider the titles of many of Still's works from the same period: *Three Negro Songs*, *Darker America*, *From the Black Belt*, *Africa*, *Afro-American Symphony*, *Ebon Chronicle*, *The Black Man Dances*. The most prominent common thread, one that deserves further exploration, is their shared interest in and use of the blues.[13] I would suggest that their respective use of African American culture, very much including the blues, bound them together in a way that their more obvious later political and personal differences tend to obscure. They shared another bond: both were attacked by white critics for their stubborn insistence on retaining vernacular elements and pursuing a kind of modernity that avoided the deliberate complexity and obscurity of white avant-garde music and poetry. Spirituals, not blues, were the elements of the

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past that were approved for rehabilitation by Harlem Renaissance critics. Still and Hughes embraced the blues in similar ways, but the results of their individual positions were slightly different. In Still's case, critics made almost no effort to understand the connection between his concert music and his cultural heritage. Thus he found himself isolated from both black and white critics by his commitment to the use of a blues-based aesthetic in his concert music and operas. For many older black critics his involvement with popular black musical theater, such as the landmark production of Sissle and Blake's *Shuffle Along* in 1921, placed him in a relatively disreputable category; white critics readily sought out indications of Still's "commercial" work in his concert music and opera, charging him with a lack of aesthetic purity. Similarly the critics often attacked Hughes for his poetry's lack of "seriousness" because of his use of vernacular language and sources for his artistic production.

Some other differences between the men are important to point out. Hughes had a gift for lyric poetry and used direct, unaffected language. Still tended to downplay his most accessible work by allowing many of his commercial song arrangements to appear anonymously or under the names of others. He understated his commercial success and chose to concentrate on composing more extended concert works. He nevertheless used a musical language that was, in relation to modernist concert music, straightforward. Both chose a form of modernism, then, that was relatively accessible to the public, and both were criticized as insufficiently "serious" as a result.

Each man was treated somewhat differently within his artistic medium. American writers and their products were certainly stratified by market, subject, and style, but the stratification of musical institutions was even more rigid. Hughes was intent on establishing himself as a man of high-class literature who used vernacular elements, but he had the example of Walt Whitman to show that it could be done—at least if you were white. Still had had extensive experience with musical theater on Broadway, and was well aware that such productions were collective efforts in which the composer's contribution was often subordinated to the demands of producers, directors, and performers. Moreover, he had recently watched as the critics insisted that George Gershwin's masterpiece, *Porgy and Bess*, could not possibly be a "real" opera owing to Gershwin's long history of Broadway successes. (It did not reach the Met for a half-century after its introduction on Broadway in 1935.) Two other of his white contemporaries, Virgil Thomson and Gian-Carlo Menotti, had chosen to produce their operas on Broadway in view of the Met's dismal record on producing operas by Americans and their shoddy treatment of the few operas they chose to present, but Still seems to have rejected this alternative out of hand. He had set his hat on getting his operas produced by the country's one major opera company, the Metropolitan Opera. He was acutely aware of the distinction between musical comedy and opera with their class- and race-based connotations, and intent on meeting the conventions and standards

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of opera as well as defeating the obvious racial barrier. Hughes was rather less than convinced about the necessity for creating opera, but, not seeing a satisfactory alternative, was entirely willing to work with Still.

My discussion of the genesis of the libretto is based on four sources:

1. The typescript synopsis/scenario/partial libretto done by Hughes, according to his annotation on the title page, "during my Guggenheim year," i.e. 1936, developed from the play produced the previous year.

2. The libretto printed for distribution at the 1949 production of the opera. It is summarized in Table 1 of the introduction to this volume.

3. The piano-vocal score and full score prepared by Still for the production, with the changes he (and Arvey) made after the production incorporated. (The changes are clear from a comparison with the published libretto and the 1949 recording of the dress rehearsal.)

4. *The Emperor of Haiti*, a play by Hughes, in a version published in 1963.[14] Because it appeared so long after the opera, I will treat it as representing Hughes's afterthoughts about the opera.

The changes from Hughes's scenario to the actual structure of the libretto for the first two acts are summarized for acts I and II in Table 1 below. Hughes divided his act I into two scenes, the first in an abandoned sugar mill and the second on a mountainside in the moonlight. In the first, Dessalines exhorts the slaves to rebel, singing "Look, these are my scars

For which the whites must pay." In the second they begin their march on their white overlords; the chorus sings "To the hills! To the hills that rise against the skies!" In the libretto, the two scenes are conflated. The opening lullaby ("Little dark slave child") expresses the slaves' aspirations, making Dessalines's political oration unnecessary. Instead, they are gathering to begin the revolt that very night. Azelia brings arms, making her role more purposeful. Her duet with Dessalines is retained. Instead of having one of the mulattos present criticize Dessalines for embracing Azelia, the finished libretto calls for a discussion about whether Vuval and Stenio, two mulattos who have formal education and have performed less oppressive labor, should be allowed to join the rebellion. At the advice of Martel, the aged councillor who sings "Africa! I remember Africa" and who reminds them that the mulattos too are slaves and that their skills will be needed, they are allowed in. Hughes's line "For which the whites must pay" is removed and a voodoo ceremony is added as a prelude to the dramatic closing chorus, "To the hills!"

Hughes's act II scenario consists of a single scene, which in the opera becomes, with some changes, scene 2 of act II. Here Still and Hughes added a new scene portraying the illiterate Dessalines trying to govern but thwarted by his dependence on the literate, dishonest, and hostile Vuval. In this scene Martel, who argues that they must trade with the hated French, is given the aria "I dream a world," a text that Hughes added as they worked and one he often read in public later on:

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I dream a world where man no other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth and peace its paths adorn.
I dream a world where all will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer sap the soul nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white, whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth, and every man is free
Where wretchedness will hang its head And joy, like pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind. Of such I dream—
Our world![15]

Dessalines then sings a duet with Claire, who has replaced the discarded Azelia as his mistress. Vuval re-enters with letter for Dessalines to sign. As Dessalines leaves, Martel warns him, "Glory is a passing thing, Take care! Beware," an almost inaudible fragment left from a longer lyric in the synopsis. When both Dessalines and Martel are safely offstage, Claire and Vuval enter. In an extended scene, they plot to overthrow Dessalines and flee to Paris. The scene ends in a love duet, one of the opera's climaxes (and one of the spots for which Arvey produced the lyrics). This scene, which gives added weight to Claire's role in ending Dessalines's rule, does not appear in Hughes's initial scenario.

Hughes's act II, which became act II, scene 2, begins with two light comic numbers reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan, a chorus of servants whose lot depends on whims of the high and mighty, whether French or African, followed by a procession of the ludicrously dressed and elaborately titled new aristocracy. In the draft scenario, the night is spent in dancing and debauchery, with suggestions of rebellion against Dessalines's megalomania. "I am the great Dessalines! I have covered my scars with diamonds,' he sings in both versions. The finished libretto is more focused, with a brief early appearance by Azelia, an elaborate dance scene in which a minuet is overwhelmed by African drumming both on and offstage to the dismay of the thoroughly Europeanized Claire. When he is told the voodoo drums are far off and out of the court's control, Dessalines sings:

Silence! Listen to me!
I fought to make Haiti free.
Now we must make it great.
If you'll not help me willingly
Then I'll make you help me! .

The chorus has meanwhile indicated its resistance: "What? Work again? Make slaves of us? No!" Martel's "Beware" goes almost unheard. At this inopportune moment, a messenger arrives to tell of the new rebellion. The celebrants fade away, and Dessalines prepares to ride forth with only one attendant, the same Popo who had helped organize the revolution at the opening of the opera. The final lines are worth repeating, since they are echoed in the conclusion to the opera as added by Still after the production:

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Dessalines: But where are all the others?
Martel: They are gone.
Popo: Without your leave, Sire, they are gone!
Dessalines: Then we go, too! Come on!

Up to this point, the contrast between these two versions may be summarized in Table 1:

TABLE 1: Comparison of Hughes's preliminary scenario and the finished libretto

Scenario (Hughes)	**Libretto (Still / Hughes)**
Act I	Act I
Scene 1: Dessalines exhorts the slaves to rebellion.	
Scene 2: The slaves depart to begin the revolution.	Scene 1: The slaves gather and begin the revolution. (Uses material from Hughes's I/1)
Act II	Act II
	Scene 1: Dessalines attempting to govern, Martel, Vuval, and Claire
Banquet Scene: Preparation, banquet, dancing, debauchery	Scene 2: Preparation, banquet, dancing, drums, news of revolt against Dessalines

Apart from filling out texts that Hughes had only suggested and providing new ones, the finished libretto is also much improved in several ways. In act I, the conflation of Hughes's two scenes into one makes a powerful statement of revolution, moving with certainty from the gathering of the rebels and the establishment of most of the characters through the voodoo sacrifice to the start of the revolution. Here Still's operatic experience shows to good advantage; musically he treated this dramatic shift effectively, as Example 1 shows. The added scene in act II shows Dessalines attempting to rule in the face of impossible conditions created by his own illiteracy and his contrarian assistants; this part of the scene, along with Martel's aria, establishes one aspect of Vuval's treachery and lays the groundwork for the counter revolt to come. Dessalines's frustration combines with his megalomania, shown in the following scene ("I am the great Dessalines," a lyric included in Hughes's outline) as a major factor in his fall.

As suggested at the start of this paper, the romantic triangle gains major dramatic importance in the finished libretto. Along with Azelia's aria in act I, Vuval's aria and the duet between Vuval and Claire at the end of act II, scene 2 strongly reinforce the personal reasons for Vuval's ongoing betrayal of both Dessalines and the revolution. It's worth noting that these are the three numbers for which Hughes did not contribute lyrics despite

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TROUBLED ISLAND

Dessalines

90

mp mf mp

From ear - ly dawn till the day was done I've worked their fields in the

Strings fl, pf

p mp p

mf f ff

burn-ing sun! For pay__ Look what they gave me for pay____

add bn, hns add clars

mp mf Broadly f Retard

fff Retard (He tears away his shirt.) (He turns, exposing to the audience his back, seared with the cruel scars of the slave whip.)

Be - hold my scars! Forceful

sff Retard Accelerate ff Retard Gradually fff Roughly fff

bn, cb, pf, tuba

Example 1:

From piano-vocal score, Act I. The climax of Dessalines's speech "Behold my scars!"; opening of chorus "To the hills." Dessalines's revolutionary motive appears in measure 8 and its upbeats; its rhythmic pattern underlies "Give out the weapons" and provides the transition to the chorus.

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(He turns so that the slaves see his back.)

(Spoken in horrified tones by all of the slaves.)

(With a great booming sound, the signal drum in the mill begins to throb. A little ways off another drum takes up the sound, relaying its message to another, until the whole countryside resounds with the call to freedom.)

fff

Ah!

91 Faster ♩. = 116

gong

large drums

p secco

Dessalines

mp (Within the mill movement and commotion reign as Dessalines incites his followers to rebellion.)

Give out the wea pons!

add stgs.

p

mf

A - way! A way! A

f

mp

92

way, Slaves, To the hills!

w.w.

mf

Example 1 (continued)

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A rise ________ and fol low me! To the

hills! ________ To the hills! ________ Stike to be

free! ________

f

tutti

Accelerate

A Little Faster ♩ 126

sff

f

stgs, pf

Broadly

Example 1 (continued)

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Note: The noise of passing out weapons, occasional fierce shouts as someone raises a weapon aloft, etc., blended with the sound of the singing voices should enhance the effectiveness and increase the excitement through the greater part of this chorus.

93

Soprano: To the hills! To the hills! To the hills that rise a gainst the skies! To the hills!

Alto

Tenor: To the hills! To the hills! To the hills that rise a gainst the skies! To the hills!

Bass

Example 1 (continued)

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repeated requests from Arvey on Still's behalf, and for which, at last, Arvey provided the texts. Hughes's neglect suggests the possibility of an unresolved disagreement between librettist and composer. Still embraced the opera's radical subject but was not interested in extensively challenging operatic tradition. His traditional operatic thinking is clear here, and very likely his extensive commercial theatrical experience as well. Operatically, it is effective to tell the story of the revolution in terms of the fate of individuals. With respect to formal tradition (and of getting a production), it is also important that the lead singers, including the women, should have substantial roles. Thus musical necessity argues for their inclusion. I think it possible that Hughes was not entirely in sympathy with the formal operatic imperative championed by Still that made these changes necessary. While it would seem relatively uncontroversial to increase Azelia's role through the added aria in act I in order to prepare her concluding scene in act III, it could certainly be argued that Claire's enhanced role, especially her scene with Vuval, add up to a distraction from the portrayal of the revolution that makes act I so powerful. One wonders whether they distract attention unnecessarily from the issues around the revolution and the uses of power that so clearly interested Hughes. Should we have been allowed to see, perhaps, that Vuval's conquest of Claire was (at least initially) motivated by his contempt for Dessalines? Might Hughes have provided such lyrics? It is worth noting here that Hughes kept Claire's enhanced role in his 1963 version of the play, adding the clarification that is missing in the libretto. Nevertheless, it may also be that by the time they came to this matter, Hughes had committed to other activities precluding further discussion in which to work out a solution more agreeable to both men.

The issues raised by the conclusion of act III are less speculative. Changes were aimed at guaranteeing basic dramatic effectiveness on the stage. The final act needed to tie up the threads of the earlier parts of the opera, showing Dessalines's end, the outcome of the revolution and the outcome of the romantic triangle, preferably in a way that allowed the themes to reinforce each other. Neither Still nor Hughes kept extended early drafts of his work or left many clues to track the development of their thinking. Yet we now have four versions of the ending, the only part of the opera with so many strands left over. Both men wished to ease the dramatic burden placed on the Azelia role that made her lengthy closing aria seem anticlimactic, but their ways of doing it differ. Still wished to reinforce the early romantic tie between Dessalines and Azelia; Hughes wished to reflect on the fate of the powerful ("Glory is a passing thing" is recalled in one of his versions.)

In all the versions, act III is set by the water in a fishing village (Cap Haitien in Hughes's draft.) The act begins with a colorful market chorus of townsfolk and continues with a playful flirtatious exchange between a fisherman and a Mango Vendor, who sings, among other things,

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Out of my way and let me pass!
All men's tongues are full of sass!

Azelia, now quite deranged, makes an appearance, and is once again mocked by the crowd. The mulattos Stenio and Vuval appear (not identified in the early scenario), preparing the ambush. Dessalines is shot (following a duel in the final version) and Azelia sings her lament. At this point, the four versions diverge in significant ways that are well worth reporting in detail.

First, the 1949 production ending as it appears in libretto and on recording:

[*Ragamuffins appear and rob the body.*]

Azelia: Get away!
That poor man is sick, or maybe dead,
And you robbing him of his clothes! Away!

[*Realizes the identity of the body*]

Jean Jacques!

[*sobs; remembers*]

Jean Jacques, my lover,
Now you lie still in death!
Broken your pride and your will!
Deserted by all save Azelia!
Never will I desert you—
I love you!

Night in the slave hut, husband of mine,
Love we shared together,
And day in the canefield, husband of mine,
Life we shared together.
Then came fame and you were King,
All the world your praise did sing—
While I was forgotten!
Emperor in golden crown,
Full of greatness and renown. .
Forgotten, but still I loved you!
Now, lonely years like dark shadows, husband of mine,
I must face tomorrow.
But the memory of our love, husband of mine,
Lights my path of sorrow.
Our destiny is in the stars—
I live to kiss your scars!

Second, Still's revisions in piano-vocal score and full score include the deletion of the casual sexual byplay between the fishermen and the Mango Vendor, with earlier texts repeated in its place. A verbal exchange is inserted after Azelia approaches the prostrate Dessalines, who in this version is mortally wounded but not dead:

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Dessalines:	Azelia! They've all gone?
Azelia:	They were never with you.
Dessalines:	Only you remain.
Azelia:	Yes, Jean Jacques.
Dessalines:	And you forgive me?
Azelia:	I love you. [returns to closing aria][16]

I believe that Still was fundamentally satisfied with the big concluding aria, and that he was responding to the critics' understanding of the Mango Vendor's byplay as stereotypically "black" when he chose to remove it. His addition of the dialogue of reconciliation between Dessalines and Azelia has the virtue of supporting Azelia's position as she sings her aria. However, along with the text of the closing aria, it puts the emphasis on their private relationship at the expense of the revolution and its lessons.

Hughes seems to have struggled with how to mourn Dessalines's death while still showing how his arrogance contributed to his downfall and how his lieutenants betrayed the revolution.[17] Both of his versions have the virtue of recalling elements of the revolutionary drama as well as providing support for the Azelia character.

The third ending, Hughes's initial scenario, reads:

[*As the soldiers and market folk scatter and disappear, she sings over the body of her once proud and scornful husband:*]

Thus it was I loved him,
Giving all my soul
In those far-off barren days
When miseries untold
Were our lot.

Rocky hills and country roads,
Blazing suns and heavy loads,
Sting of lash and sweat of toil,
Then the terror and turmoil;
All we passed together.

Thus it was I loved him!
Then came fame,
He was an Emperor with a great name.
He built a castle with many towers,
He took other women for his golden hours,
He was a bee with many flowers,
But even then I loved him.

[*Chorus of market women and fishermen drawing nearer:*]

Chorus:	Glory is a passing thing! A passing thing! A passing thing!
Azelia:	Now he lies in death all still, His pride is fallen, broken his will— Yet I kiss his scars.

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Even now I kiss his scars—
Thus it is I love him.

Soldiers: Thus it was she loved him.

Azelia: Thus it is I love him.

[*The soldiers lift his body high in the air against the sails of the fishing boats and the glow of the setting sun. They exit slowly as the chorus intones: Glory is a passing thing. And a ragged woman sobs in the dust:*]

I kiss his scars!

I kiss his scars!

[*As the music brings back the theme of Behold my scars! Then there is a great volume of ironic sound, as the CURTAIN FALLS.*] [Note: The line "Destiny is in the stars" is added at this point in Hughes's hand to this typescript.]

Hughes's revised version as published in the play of 1963 (There is of course no lengthy aria text in the play versions.):

Azelia: . . Once we slept in a slave corral, together, you and I. But when you slept in a palace, you didn't need Azelia. [*Tenderly.*] My sweetheart! Oh, my dear! You offered me money, then, too much money for one who loved you. [*Caressingly, she rubs her hands across his body.*] But I still love you, Jean Jacques! I still love you!

[*The sound of voices approaching. Two servants cross the steps, carrying a heavy chest, as VUVAL appears in the seawall, pale as a ghost.*]

Vuval: [*Directing the men.*] Down the beach, to the skiff.

[*The servants exit toward the beach. The others enter with a similar chest and follow the first pair. Then CLAIRE HEUREUSE comes swiftly across the square, accompanied by her maid. As she passes, in spite of herself, she pauses to glance at the body of the fallen man [Dessalines]. Quickly she puts her hands across her eyes and shudders with a memory she can never lose.*]

Claire: [*In a whisper.*] Those scars! [*As she mounts the steps, VUVAL takes her in his arms and they disappear toward the beach. Moaning in crazy monotones, AZELIA rocks above her dead* [sic]. *Two fishermen appear on the seawall, carrying strings of silver fish. They pause to look at the strange pair.*]

Tall Fisherman: Who's that laying over there with that crazy old woman?

Short Fisherman: [*Coming closer to the body.*] He musta been a slave once—from the looks of his back.

Azelia: [*Without turning her head.*] He was a slave, once . .[*She gently spreads her shawl over his shoulders.*] then a King!

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[*The fishermen remove their hats, as / CURTAIN / THE END*][18]

As it was sung in the 1949 production, the end of the opera was left to one singer with a longish aria, a difficult and risky challenge both dramatic and musical. We have Carl Van Vechten's private assessment of the production in a letter to Hughes, that the ending was "completely anti-climactic" and that Marie Powers, the Azelia of the first performance, was not comfortable in the role and was therefore not entirely convincing in her closing aria.[19] It is regrettable that more of Hughes's lyric was not retained; even a partial recurrence at the end would have allowed a telling musical reference to accompany the ending:

> Glory is a passing thing,
> Take care! Beware!
> Wine and women and songs that sing
> Are light as air.
> Likewise are fame and glory—
> Things that pass—
> Beware!

To conclude, the librettist and composer probably disagreed about the central theme of the work; whether it is, first and foremost, Dessalines's tragedy, or Azelia's tragedy, or Haiti's tragedy. The enlarged roles played by Azelia and Claire risk pushing aside the revolution. If, instead of being simply participants in love triangles, Azelia can be made to always represent the common people and Claire to always represent the untrustworthy middle class corrupted (like Dessalines) by power, then the broader theme of revolution can be strengthened. Perhaps Azelia should have been allowed to sing a warning to Dessalines and the company gathered at the banquet instead of being shut out, a possibility hinted at by Carl Van Vechten in his letter to Hughes quoted above. Such a maneuver would have made it unnecessary to enlarge Martel's role with a second aria. I would offer, then, that the ending of the opera as it was produced dilutes what I think must remain central to its effectiveness. When the ending concentrates only on Azelia's personal grief, the opera's central message is weakened. If the opera is to be revived successfully now, Still's late added dialogue might well be retained, but with stage business added at the end, according to Hughes's late version of the play. We need to be reminded of Vuval and Claire's flight from the revolution over the bodies of Dessalines and Azelia, the opera's original revolutionaries. Thus might the aspirations of both creators be better realized to the benefit of the opera.

Notes

1. This paper is a revision of a paper read to a joint conference of the Center for Black Music Research and the Society for American Music, 29 May 2001.

2. Langston Hughes papers, James Weldon Johnson collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University. A wide-ranging discussion on the political and literary implications of

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U.S. interventions in Haiti, including an occupation that lasted from 1915-1934, is found in Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See especially Part II, pp. 185-300, for discussions of several literary works on Haiti. Hughes (but not this opera or Hughes's play) is discussed 261-264 and 281-283.

3. The cover sheet for Hughes's "Synopsis for an opera libretto" in the Hughes papers carries the note "adapted from the play. Score in possession of William Grant Still. (Signed) Langston Hughes. Done during my Guggenheim year." In his magisterial biography, Arnold Rampersad dates Hughes's opera proposal as early as 1930. Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, second edition, 2 vol. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; 1986, 1988), vol. i, 175.

4. Letter, Arna Bontemps to Langston Hughes, 8 November 1936, in *Arna Bontemps-Langston Hughes Letters, 1925-1967* / selected and edited by Charles H. Nichols (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1980), 25. For more on Karamu House, called the Playhouse Settlement at the time Hughes's plays were produced there, see www.karamu.com.

5. Rampersad, 2: 157-158, 166-167, describes these from Hughes's point of view. Still's positions are examined in Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), in the chapter "'Harlem Renaissance Man' Revisited: The Politics of Race and Class in Still's Late Career," 182-212.

6. Rampersad, vol. I:336-7 (1986). Among other projects, Hughes worked with Jan Meyerowitz on *The Barrier* and with Kurt Weill on *Street Scene*, both of them between the time he worked with Still in 1938 and the production in 1949.

Before they began working together, Still wrote to Hughes, "Please remember that it is absolutely necessary for us to keep in touch if we are to collaborate." (postcard, Still to Hughes, 16 December 1935, Langston Hughes papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.) Still later described his manner of working, involving close and continuing collaboration, with Verna Arvey, in a letter to Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* dated 20 September 1949. They agreed on the text of recitatives before he composed them; in the case of the arias, they agreed on the first lines and she filled them out only after they were composed. (Copy in Still-Arvey papers, Department of Special Collections, University of Arkansas–Fayetteville.) Since some of the texts in Hughes's synopsis were in fact set by Still, it is clear that he did not follow that practice consistently in his collaboration with Hughes.

7. This point is especially important to the staging of the choruses "Slaves of this world are we" and "To polish and shine," which should reveal their nature as parodies of older musical comedy stereotypes. In Hughes's final version of the play, the banquet scene is introduced by servants who complain, not about their perennial lot as servants regardless of who is in charge (as in "To polish and shine"), but about the Emperor's stinginess and other shortcomings; the atmosphere is very different.

8. Letter, Bontemps to Hughes, 8 November 1936, in *Arna Bontemps-Langston Hughes Letters, 1925-1967*, 25.

9. Langston Hughes, *Chicago Defender,* March 26, 1949, 6.

10. Bundy's manuscript has not been located. Cullen withdrew presently.

11. I am grateful to Julia Foulkes for calling my attention to the 1935 correspondence from Still to Dunham at Southern Illinois University. Later on, Hughes provided several scenarios for Dunham, an enterprising dancer and organizer of her own company.

12. C. James Trotman, "'For All the Kids to Come': The *Troubled Island* of William Grant Still and Langston Hughes," in C. James Trotman and Emery Wimbish, Jr., editors, *Langston Hughes: The Man, His Art, and his Continuing Influence* (New York and London: Garland publishing, Inc., 1995), 109-118. Trotman quotes Still's daughter, Judith Anne Still, who wrote to him in a letter dated 13 January 1992, "He believed that prejudice was only an affliction of the ignorant and the inept, and that the majority of white people would abjure hatred when led to enlightenment by the intelligent Afro-Americans. It was his conviction that, if the colored man excelled in all areas of endeavor and made significant contributions to science and to culture, and if he made strides without terrorism or social protest, the result would be the best of all possible worlds where all races lived together in peace. He tried, artistically, to express emotions and common feelings, rather than to depict racial bitterness" (110-111). Judith Still's

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response ignores the fact that her father often expressed "common feelings" through racially specific references; remarkably, she imputes racial bitterness to any who took a position different from her father's.

13. The main theme of the *Afro-American Symphony* is the best-known use of a blues in Still's music; it was very much a novelty for symphonic music at the time Still composed that work (1931). Blues-influenced forms occur in many other places as well. One outstanding example is in the "Ave Maria," the dramatic tenor-baritone duet that ends act II of the opera *Costaso*.

14. Published in *Black Heroes: Seven Plays*, ed. Errol Hill (NY: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1989), 1-74.

15. With the lines divided, this text appears in Rampersad ii, 25.

16. This example is reproduced in *A Study in Contradictions*, 190-191; also in Smith, "'Harlem Renaissance Man' Revisited: The Politics of Race and Class in William Grant Still's Late Career," *American Music* 15 (1997):381-406, 387-388. I have pointed out its parallel with the conclusion of act II, scene 2 earlier in this essay; in the two places cited at the start of this note I have used it as an emblem of the feelings of betrayal Still and Arvey developed about the production of *Troubled Island* and Still's later career.

17. The end of the published play is annotated, presumably by Hughes, "frequently revised to its present version." Hill, editor, *Black Heroes: Seven Plays*, 76.

18. Langston Hughes, "Emperor of Haiti," in Errol Hill, editor, *Black Heroes: Seven Plays*. (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1989), 74. The plan is annotated at the end as "frequently revised to its present version" (76).

19. Letter, Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, 5 April 1949, in Emily Bernard, ed., *Remember me to Harlem: The letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001):

[Hughes was not to be found after the opera to acknowledge his achievement.] . . Where WERE YOU? The music is conventional (and so, to be frank, is the book) and rather lightoperaish, but it is tuneful and never dull. The direction was appallingly bad. With better direction the music and book would both be brightened considerably. The orchestral direction was brilliant. I found the best singers (and actors) the girl who sung the opening lullaby [Muriel O'Malley], Richard Charles, the tenor [Vuval], and [Oscar] Nat[z]ka [Martel], tho [Robert] Weede [Dessalines] was far from bad. Marie Powers [Azelia], a great actress and singer in other roles was completely miscast and frankly pretty Godawful. More like a windmill than a Negro.

The natural ending of the opera and a terrifically ironic and stunning one would have been the robbing of the body by the street-boys. What follows is completely anti-climactic. As it stands, the part of Azelia should have a more dramatic scene in the second act. The whole thing would be better done by Negroes, but it is very important to impress upon repertory musical theatres the idea that it is not necessary to engage a Negro company to give a Negro opera. I think more will be heard of this work.

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