

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Man: The Jewel of Jewels or The Topaz of Ethiopia

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/80r833xg>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 22(1-2)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Hughes, Marvis

Publication Date

1994

DOI

10.5070/F7221-2016726

Copyright Information

Copyright 1994 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

MAN: THE JEWEL OF JEWELS
OR THE TOPAZ OF ETHIOPIA

*"The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it
neither shall it be valued with pure gold."*

Job 28: 19

I

Grim tide:
once more the returning scythe
sweeps over the land.
*"And Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands
unto God."*
Is this that bitter time, ultimate and divine?;
or penultimate or another and another
in the sacred tragedy?;
prologue or entre-acte
man-made/man-acted, the last act
or another and another transaction
to what god
in the unending saga
of dry bones desert dances?

"Man knoweth not the price thereof."
What great jewel
will be knit of these millions million new bones?
Who dares to think a price can be paid
to wear upon a finger this jewel,
the century's pressed graves,
geology of disaster, questionable stratigraphy,
the leavings/detritus of war & drought & war & war,
archaeologists' nightmare.
Who dares embrace as boon Death's seasons
and make a bubble
of the unreasoned tomb?
Whose god? Whose ransom this?
...and dares think one's self embellished/enobled/redeemed
by slaughter?
A work of darkness in darkness,
a contract the Death-angel writes,
mined by haughty man,
which some man's folly signs.
Toward what end the million unadorned & weeping hands

writhe in the Hamitic morning,
 ringing in each carmine dawn
 on the Horn of Mourning
 starved out of joy
 dried out of tears——

for teardrops, sand.

Is this the way the hymn of the first world ends?
 Lamentation without smiles & dour paeon?
 Egypt-Ethiopia-Sheba-Somalia-Nubia: No The Ancient——
 Ueset, Net, Ha-Amon in Chnum, Tabu capital of the world,
 its thousand years of splendour,
 Thebes on the Nile.
*"Egypt and Ethiopia were her strength
 and it was infinite.";*
 her legacy, her pride:

first master-builder of the world
 first civilizer, first cities raised,
 first world-famine's respite—*"And
 the famine was over all the face of the earth. . .
 but in all the land of Egypt there was bread
 and all countries came into Egypt
 . . .to buy corn."*
 No The Ancient, No-Amon.
 No-Amon means "nourishing adobe,"
 "nourishing pasture."
 No-Amon means "nourishing,"
 fecund land of maize, Horn of Plenty, gift of the Nile—
 first followers of Jesus of Nazareth the Christ
 first milk, first grain, first glass, first iron,
 first cloth, first vessels of clay,
 first writers, first numberers,
 first charters of the clear cloudless starry sky,
 first geometers of the bright sand-glinting day,
*"And the first shall be last
 and the last shall be first. . ."*
 Alpha-&-Omega
 O children of No-Ah,
 ten-thousand-times-great grandchildren of No-Ah,
 children of the upright
"in God's sight."
 Is this the way the hymn of the first world ends?
 warred out peace

racked out perfection
 starved out of song
 for bodies, bones
 for land, graves
 dried out of tears——

for teardrops, sand.

II

August 12, 1992

This night
 Earth's half-turn away
 from the silent, shriven African day.
 Magadisho's harrowing beam
 the line that goes out of Africa
 glances North to 118West 34 North
 into the bosom,
 into the heart of the Mother of Mountains
 earth mother, mountain mother, Sierra Madre, the ancient height
 worn down by her eon's turnings
 to a ridge-bordered plain
 118West / 34North
 longitude/latitude of the 'Earthly Paradise',
 California, City of the Angels.

In the midnight sky, a lyre.
 White wisps of clouds arching
 each side of the silver disk of moon;
 long, slender graceful curves
 like ostrich feather furls
 embellish aethereal struts
 of an ancient celestial harp.
 The moon beams are its strings.

In this instant & place
 a gentle breeze of the world wind blows
 in this instant & place moonbeam strings are strung,
 for you who are in this moment upwardly gazing.

Perseus meteors, comet shards, pluck the moonstrings
 sounding notes of a galactic song;
 streaming from Perseus, ancient hero,
 dragon slayer, gorgon slayer

who saved the suffering,
vanquished danger,
pledged true love,
rescued the stranger,
flashing from Northeast,
birthplace of the dawn,
in Eden, in Africa, Memnon's mother.
'edn means the ear, to hear.

The cloud harp with moonlight strings
plays the might hero's song;
meter/tempo: six beats each hour
these three night's long.
An angel sings for the dusky, star-eyed, starving children.
"Those who have ears, let them hear"

this august music.

Marvis Hughes
1992