A Dream Deferred: Nina Simone and the Work of Mourning

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What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore
and then run?

(Langston Hughes, ‘Harlem’)

Poster for A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry
Nina Simone (1933-2003)

Introduction

Nina Simone was a performer who received a great deal of attention during her heyday in the 1960s but relatively little within the Anglophone world in the later stages of her career. She continued to be revered in France – the country in which she lived for the last years of her life until her death in 2003 – and had a brief boost to her career in the United Kingdom following the success of ‘My Baby Just Cares For Me’ in the 1980s. In her later years, when she was written about, it tended to be in terms that emphasised her successful past and difficult present. There is still a surprising absence of commentary on Simone and her work in general accounts of blues, jazz, soul and other forms of black music; this is also true of scholarly work on music and gender. However, Simone's later life was also a time of profound reflection for the artist and, for anyone involved in researching her life and work, her late period provides some invaluable documents. The early 1990s saw the publication of her autobiography, *I Put a Spell on You*, the release of a documentary of her career, a French production entitled *La Légende* and a new studio album. While most of these documents concerned themselves with her past they were all narrated in what I call her "late voice", a voice that attempts to connect history as it really was with memory as it is now, often leading to a suggestion of history as it should have been. Simone attempted her reconciliation with history as it really was by moving away from the site of her disappointment. She came to be seen as a performer who was unable, unwilling or – as she herself would see it – denied the opportunity to rescale the heights of her 1960s heyday. While pursuing her own memory work – her increasingly nostalgic songs, her autobiographical projects – she became subject to the memory work of her audience, who looked back to that same heyday.

Despite the relative exclusion of Simone from general works on black music, the years since her death have witnessed a growing interest in her life and career. A number of biographies have appeared, as have scholarly articles addressing her role in the civil rights movement. My book draws upon all these sources, and on Simone's own account of her life, while placing greater emphasis on the interpretation of music from across the artist's entire career. My account of Simone's music offers a hermeneutics of her work that connects to parallel...
histories, concepts and theories. The book explicitly addresses what some authors regard as the problem of reading Simone’s work through reference to her life and its socio-historical context, as opposed to viewing the work primarily from an aesthetic perspective. Ultimately it argues that these factors should not be separated but that it is important that questions regarding their relationship be constantly raised, if only to maintain a focus on the quality of Simone’s work as a musician.

Another element of the book is its proposal of a theory of the "late voice", a concept which refers both to biography and to aesthetics. The late voice, I argue, is both something than can be discussed in terms of work carried out late in an artist’s career and an aesthetic strategy which artists can deploy at any stage in their work and which, in fact, can often be detected in the early work of many. Nina Simone is hardly unique in this respect but she is an exemplary representative of the late voice in that her work is characterised by an emphasis on experience, loss, memory, disappointment, yearning and nostalgia.

In this paper, I cover three periods of Nina Simone’s recorded career, 1963-4, the period of her first self-written protest material; 1968, the year of Martin Luther King’s murder and Simone’s response to it; and the more general period of Simone’s late career (70s-90s). In each period I focus on aspects of mourning and memorialising, suggesting that Simone’s work represents a continual process of working-through in which mourning, melancholy and nostalgia remain unresolved, mutually informing elements.

1963-64: Mississippi Goddam

| Medgar Evers (1925-1963) |
| Denise McNair (1951-1963) |
| Cynthia Wesley (1949-1963) |
| Carole Robertson (1949-1963) |
| Addie Mae Collins (1949-1963) |

Mississippi Goddam’ remains arguably Simone’s most famous protest song and, not surprisingly, forms the basis for many responses to her work. Three powerful analyses of Simone’s role in the politics of freedom of the 1960s (by Ruth Feldstein, Tammy Kernodle and Daphne Brooks) devote much of their space to discussion of the song. Like them, I’m interested in way that Nina Simone connected the song’s composition to a subjectivizing
event and it’s worth sampling how that event, which occurred in 1963, was recalled by Simone in her 1991 autobiography:

In Mount Vernon we had a little apartment built over the garage which was my private hideaway, where I went to practise and prepare for forthcoming performances. I was sitting there in my den on 15 September when news came over the radio that somebody had thrown dynamite into the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama while black children were attending a Bible study class. Four of them – Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Addie Mae Collins – had been killed. Later that day, in the rioting which followed, Birmingham police shot another black kid and a white mob pulled a young black man off his bicycle and beat him to death, out in the street. It was more than I could take, and I sat struck dumb in my den like St Paul on the road to Damascus: all the truths that I had denied to myself for so long rose up and slapped my face. The bombing of the little girls in Alabama and the murder of Medgar Evers were like the final pieces of a jigsaw that made no sense until you had fitted the whole thing together. I suddenly realised what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn’t an intellectual connection of the type Lorraine [Hansberry] had been repeating to me over and over – it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I “came through”.

Simone’s first reaction is a desire for violent revenge for the atrocious events that have brought home to her the excess of her (and her fellow black Americans’) situation. She attempts to build a gun in order to deliver retribution to the objects of her “hatred” and “fury”. Her husband, a former police officer, discovers her and stops her, saying, “Nina, you don’t know anything about killing. The only thing you’ve got is music.” Simone accepts this and sits down at her piano:

An hour later I came out of my apartment with the sheet music for ‘Mississippi Goddam’ in my hand. It was my first civil rights song, and it erupted out of me quicker than I could write it down. I knew then that I would dedicate myself to the struggle for black justice, freedom and equality under the law for as long as it took, until all our battles were won.

As Simone goes on to note, when she started to become involved in the civil rights movement many already considered her an activist due to the publicity she gave to various aspects of the movement in her concerts and in interviews. She had already recorded songs such as Oscar Brown’s ‘Brown Baby’ and her “Afrocentric” numbers from ‘Zungo’ onwards had asserted a “return to Africa” that reflected the emerging manifestoes of black nationalist organizations. But clearly Simone felt it necessary, in this retrospective account, to delimit a before and after, to hinge her commitment to civil rights upon a decisive event.

The event of conversion can be read into the unfolding narrative of ‘Mississippi Goddam’ itself.

[PLAY ‘Mississippi Goddam’]

The tune, in the first recorded version, starts off at something of a gallop, its uptempo rhythm seemingly eliciting pleasure from the Carnegie Hall audience, who laugh when Simone introduces the song. The opening lines are repeated, as if inviting a singalong, though it quickly becomes clear that this will be a hard tune to learn as Simone changes the melody, slowing and stretching her vocals. When she issues another interjection – the ‘show tune’ quip – it’s received with more laughter from the audience.
In just under five minutes Simone manages to set a number of contemporaneous debates to music:

1. an assertion of the “double consciousness” claimed by W.E.B. Du Bois as a conditioning factor of the black experience in America (“I don’t belong here / I don’t belong there”)
2. a sense of desperation and an accompanying loss of faith (“I’ve even stopped believing in prayer”, she declares at one point, as if the blasphemous “Goddam” had not already proven it)
3. debates played out between various civil rights groups (CORE, SCLC, SNCC) and black leaders (Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael) over the place of nonviolence and armed struggle.

Mirroring the shifting musical sands of the song, the position taken up by the narrator changes as she describes a growing sense that violence is the only option left and delivers violence upon her audience through the declamatory, performative nature of the lyrics. Simone cleverly combines what J.L. Austin described as “constative” language (that which describes facts or gives information) with “performative” language (that which does functional work: greetings, warnings, threats and curses).
What marked ‘Mississippi Goddam’ out from anything Simone had hitherto recorded were its anger, its sense of immediacy and insistence, and its strategies of alienation. As far as the latter goes, it could be seen as a successor to Billie Holiday’s ‘Strange Fruit’, an invasion of brutal reportage into the polite environs of the supper club. The recording on In Concert would support such a reading, witnessing as it does a subtle but noticeable change come over the audience as the song narrative unfolds. But in other crucial ways, ‘Mississippi Goddam’ is a very different song from ‘Strange Fruit’, without the stillness and neutral, curious tone with which Holiday imbued her performance. Simone’s is declamatory and insistent, closer perhaps to the cry placed in the title of the classic civil rights jazz recording, We Insist! Freedom Now Suite (1960), on which the drummer Max Roach had collaborated with Oscar Brown, Jr. and vocalist Abbey Lincoln.

As Dorian Lynskey points out, ‘Mississippi Goddam’ also echoes the voice overheard in the crowd witnessing King’s “I have a dream” speech, a voice which responds to King’s vision by crying “Goddam!” It is this declamatory quality that gave the song its power and that gave it a foothold in history, making it now seem both evocative of its time and continually, insistently relevant and disturbing. “Goddam” may have been a ruder, more shocking declaration in the Carnegie Hall atmosphere of 1964 than it would be today, but, because we know this, we can still witness the unsettling process of hearing Simone alienate her audience as the song unfolds. What is more, the decades that have elapsed since this landmark recording have done little to diminish the power of lines such as “you’re all gonna die and die like flies”. 
1968: ‘The Martin Luther King Suite’

‘Why? (The King of Love is Dead)’ was Nina Simone’s haunting tribute to Martin Luther King. It was one of a suite of songs performed by Simone and her band at the Westbury Music Fair in New York on Sunday 7th April 1968, shortly after King’s murder and was written by Simone’s bassist Gene Taylor. As Simone says at the outset, the band had had just one day to learn it and the performance subsequently seems to veer between the rehearsed and the improvised. ‘Why?’ has made various appearances on record and CD, initially appearing in edited form on the RCA album ‘Nuff Said (1968) and later being partially restored to its original version as part of the “Martin Luther King Suite” on various compilations. The full, unedited version can be heard on the compilation Forever Young, Gifted & Black and begins in a quietly elegiac tone.

[PLAY ‘Why? (The King of Love Is Dead)’]

Taylor’s epic opening – “Once upon this planet Earth” – sets the tone for a reverential account of King’s life, work and dreams. To begin with, Simone stays clear of militancy as she emphasizes King’s Christian message, the tragic sacrifice he was forced to pay and the possibility that he might have died in vain. Lateness is the song’s keynote: King’s lateness, Simone’s growing sense of lateness, and a general sense of lateness and loss for the civil rights movement. In one of the many unanswered questions of the song, Taylor and Simone ask “is it too late for us all?”

‘Why?’ can be heard as a motivated act of remembering, wondering and yearning. As remembrance the narrative is not inaccurate but, as with many elegies, accuracy is less important than the act of recalling a person’s life and its meaning for a wider congregation. ‘Why?’ acts as a song of wonder and yearning simply through its positing of childishly simple, yet difficult-to-answer, questions. Why does it have to be this way? Why can’t things
be different? The black female voice, which Farah Jasmine Griffin describes as one of the “founding sounds” of the USA, has often been called upon to provide solace in moments of historical rupture. It is also a voice that “expresses a quality of longing: longing for home, for love, for connection with God, for heaven, for freedom … a conduit between what and where we are and what and where we want to be”. As with the musical role models discussed by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison in their book Music and Social Movements, it is clear that Simone needed to offer a response to the tragedy of April 4 and that those affected by the tragedy needed to hear from an artist of her stature, ability and socio-political position. But ‘Why?’ does not consist solely of questions. To be sure, it manifests one of the commonly understood phases of mourning in its bewildered and uncomprehending ‘whys’, in its pain and numbness. But it also enacts another phase of mourning by showing anger and a refusal to accept what has happened. After seven minutes of Taylor’s elegiac gospel song (closer, perhaps, to the kind of “sorrow songs” discussed by W.E.B. Du Bois in The Souls of Black Folk), Simone and the band start to raise the volume and the singer’s voice takes on a harder edge as she poses a new question: what will happen in the cities now that “our people are rising”? Utilizing some of the stop-start drama of her earlier reading of ‘Pirate Jenny’, Simone brings the searchlight of her voice to flash on “that moment that you know what life is”, a moment of decision – an event – where the attainment of a new, more meaningful subjectivity is recognized, a commitment and fidelity that can survive even death. To a dramatically rolling piano accompaniment, Simone testifies that “you know what freedom is, for one moment of your life”. As she returns to Taylor’s lyric, the song takes on a new, less fatalistic, more assertive dimension, no longer a question raised to a cruel God, but rather a threat and prediction of “the fire next time“.

During the song, Simone also takes the time to reflect on the loss of other role models and cultural beacons: “Lorraine Hansberry left us … and then Langston Hughes left us, Coltrane left us, Otis Redding left us. Who can go on? Do you realize how many we have lost? … We can’t afford any more losses. … They’re shooting us down one by one.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, Simone also used ‘Mississippi Goddam’ in her Westbury concert to comment on King’s murder and to connect it to other incidents, not least the church bombing that had inspired the writing of the song. At one point she replaces “Tennessee” with “Memphis”, a reference to the city where King was shot; later, calling upon the audience to join her in song, Simone shouts “the time is too late now … the King is dead!” As if it were not clear that ‘Mississippi Goddam’ is delivering on the threats hinted at in ‘Why?’, Simone declares “I ain’t about to be nonviolent honey!” Unlike the version of the song immortalized on the In Concert album, here it is Simone who is laughing. Her laughter seems as strange and out of place as that of the audience in the earlier version but we should probably hear it as an illogical response to an illogical and impossible situation.
Nina Simone's body of work is one in which issues of musical style, categorization and virtuosity are played out alongside those of social history, politics and biography in fascinating ways. The biographical aspects of Simone’s work are characterized by the interplay of innocence and experience, a feature which becomes more notable as one follows Simone through her entire career. As with many performers, we find in Simone’s mature work a greater emphasis on life experience, perhaps not surprising given that there are more years to look back on, not to mention the sense in which a commercial, if not artistic, peak has been passed.

For some critics, Simone's refusal of categorization is connected to an individualism that takes off from where collective politics ends or fails. For others, however, it is the refusal itself which is political. Ashley Kahn writes: "Forever binding music and message, Simone ultimately saw her defiance of category – social, racial, musical – as an intrinsic part of her mission of self-affirmation and protest". This would seem to tie in with Simone's own views; in her autobiography she claimed, "For black musicians the result of the sixties was exile to dance music and the old black ghettos of jazz and blues". While many have suggested that black music has sought to move on to new styles whenever its previous innovations have been co-opted by the white mainstream, a process that leads to a recurrent black creativity in popular music, Simone seems to find an attachment to black music occasionally regressive rather than progressive. And while the developments in black soul, jazz, blues and funk are arguably manifestations of a range of political aesthetics, Simone would seem to suggest that her politics resides in her ability to take on the pop mainstream and do it her way. This does appear at odds with her oft-recorded advocacy of black separatism over assimilation, and of militancy over diplomacy, but these are all aspects of what Kahn calls her "enduring enigma".
In an overview of Simone's work for RCA, Stuart Nicholson suggests that the mixture of militant "protest" material with lightweight pop fare was a way for her to smuggle the former material past the record company executives responsible for releasing her albums. This may be true to a certain extent but it would be wrong to assume that Simone was only interested in "serious" or "protest" music and only included pop material to please others. There is a tendency for critics, biographers and other commentators to assume that because they do not consider certain material of high quality, there must have been some motive in Simone's choice of the material other than aesthetic pleasure. There are, however, numerous examples of concert performances where Simone showed very little concern about others’ desires and yet still performed mainstream pop songs that had seemingly little to do with "the cause". It is worth noting Robin Kelley's point that, while issues of class, race, gender and other aspects of identity politics are vital when discussing popular culture, this should not be to the exclusion of aesthetic or other types of pleasure. I would argue that it is with such issues in mind – and in particular the bittersweet pleasures of memory, nostalgia and unresolved yearning – that we should approach Nina Simone's late voice.

As for teleology, which is always at least implied in any discussion of lateness, Kahn warns against seeing stylistic progression from one point of Simone's career to another, stressing rather an expansion of the repertoire with the old numbers still played, performed, recorded, updated. Indeed, in a manner analogous to the way Ajay Heble highlights Paul Robeson's changing improvisations of the lyrics to 'Ol' Man River' over the years to reflect the presence of black resistance to the white mainstream, it is worth noting the way Nina Simone continued to improvise on the lyrics of 'Mississippi Goddam' late in her career to work in references to Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Jesse Jackson and Michael Jackson amongst others. The song has this possibility built into its structure so that, even in its "original" form, the final payoff involves the introduction of new terms ("Alabama", for example) into the "Mississippi" placeholder ("Everybody knows about ______"). However, while I agree with Kahn that Simone's repertoire was one that defied neat chronology, I also believe that a distinctive "late voice" can be identified, one that is compatible with accounts – including Simone's own – of the singer's increasing disillusionment over the failure of the civil rights movement. Ron Eyerman describes this "failure" as follows:

The 1960s appeared differently to whites and blacks. Whites tend to remember the sixties as filled with political and cultural confrontation, where young college students protested against the war in Vietnam, where a sexual revolution altered the boundaries of what was normal and acceptable, and where feminism changed the way Americans looked at gender, marriage and family life. ... Blacks, especially those influenced by cultural nationalism, remember something different. Here the period tends to be viewed through a perceived defeat of the civil rights movement, the failure to either achieve its goals of inclusion or to speak to the specific needs of urban blacks. The failure, in other words, of the progressive narrative. (2001, 191)

The loss of the ideals of the movement followed the loss of so many individuals associated with it. Nina Simone was painfully aware of these losses. Even as she was writing and recording a track called 'Revolution' (which can be heard as an answer-song to John Lennon's critically-mauled song of the same name), she had an increasing sense that it was all for nothing.

From her autobiography:
The days when revolution really had seemed possible were gone forever. I watched the survivors run for cover in community and academic programmes and felt betrayed, partly by our own leaders but mostly by white America. And I felt disgusted by my own innocence. I had presumed we could change the world and had run down a dead-end street leaving my career, child and husband way behind, neglected. Optimists talked about the advances we had made, but all I saw were lost opportunities.

(118)

Weighed down by the burden of knowledge and the realization that the promised event had not materialized, Simone moved away from the USA and withdrew from the public eye. Her “disappearance” was such that, in an obituary for the singer in 2003, Dave Marsh felt able to write that "Nina Simone hadn't made an important record or written a well-known song since the early 1970s, so in a sense her absence will not be widely felt" (preface to Simone and Cleary 2003, vi). I would dispute the accuracy of this statement, not least because it is unclear for whom Marsh was speaking. As Mark Anthony Neal (2003) points out, and as I discuss in the final chapter of my book, Simone continued to matter a great deal to African Americans during her years of exile. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that her position in the public eye moved from one based on the present to one based on past triumphs.

The notion of the artist as "a shadow of their former self", or even a pastiche of their former self, is one of the ways in which loss is inscribed into the discourse of popular music’s teleology. Rather than dwelling here on the level (or lack) of acceptance of ageing in popular music discourse, I wish to note how a move may often be seen to be made from early innovation to later memory work. This memory work may result in the often-seen representation of an artist as a living repository of past hits (“golden oldies”) but may also lead to the creation of a quite new persona.

As examples of this, I want to briefly consider two late Nina Simone albums, *Nina's Back*, which was recorded in 1985 in New York, and her final studio album from 1993, *A Single Woman*. The two albums both contain versions of songs associated with the Frank Sinatra's
late 1960s period, highlighting Simone’s continued interest in Sinatra – the two artists shared a fair amount of repertoire and Simone had recorded what for my money remains the definitive version of ‘My Way’ at the end of the 1960s. The songs Simone recorded for her late albums all come from two albums recorded by Sinatra in 1969, A Man Alone and Watertown, both notable for being song suites created especially for Sinatra to perform and written with a particular image of Sinatra in mind. In the case of A Man Alone, this meant Rod McKuen, a highly successful "pop-poet" and translator of Jacques Brel's songs, providing the kind of material suited to Sinatra's more "vulnerable" side. Watertown, written by Jake Holmes and Bob Gaudio, was an attempt to take Sinatra further into "abandoned male" territory than he had previously been and was a concept album that told the story of a father attempting to bring up his two children and get over his loss after his wife leaves their small Midwestern town for a new life in the big city.

Although not Sinatra's best known or critically lauded work, Nina Simone clearly heard something in these albums. The first recording she made of the material was a version of 'For a While', a track from Watertown.1 The song's lyricist Jake Holmes said of the song:

I've always felt that there is that moment in your life, when you forget about something that is really terrible. For five minutes the sun is shining and everything is beautiful. Then all of a sudden you realize that the person you cared about is gone, and it all comes back. It is one of those horrible things about grief – one of those little holes in grief when it becomes even more painful.

(quoted in liner notes to Watertown)

The memory process Holmes describes resembles the Proustian "rush" that interrupts the everyday with the shock of all that has been lost. The song opens with a suggestion that radical, unassimilated loss has been covered over – made distant – by a more homely loss associated with the mundane. The narrator gets by as just fine until those Proustian moments when the memory of loss manifests itself. The sentiment is similar to an earlier song that Sinatra and Simone had recorded, Hoagy Carmichael's 'I Get Along Without You Very Well', with its famous list of exceptions: "except when soft rains fall", "except when I hear your name", "except perhaps in Spring". A notable difference resides in the fact that Carmichael's protagonist recognizes that (s)he should not let these moments happen, whereas Holmes has his protagonist rebuke friends for trying to keep him company: "They forget that I'm not over you / For a while". He has twisted the title's meaning to suggest that he wants to hang on to this longing. Rather than mourn and move on, he wishes to remain melancholy.

For Simone, drifting increasingly between mourning and melancholy, it was an ideal song to perform. The version she recorded for Nina's Back is not notable musically, in that she is backed by a group whose mid-1980s jazz-rock – overemphasized by the production – provides an arrangement that threatens to overwhelm the lyric. However, what Simone does with the lyric is notable, especially for any listener who has more than a passing interest in the artist's career and personal life. I am going to play an extract from a live performance, where Simone’s interpretation is more prominent:

[PLAY ‘For A While’: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq12jRWlitQ]

She delivers the first verse unchanged, but changes a line in the second from "some work I've got to do" to "some music I've got to do". The alteration is small but telling and sets us up for the next changes: firstly the addition of the phrase "I touch my hair and I touch my skin" just before "I remember you're gone"; secondly, the lines "People say to me / Nina, you need some company". If we had been unsure before, there now seems little doubt that this is a song about Simone herself. Where the gap between the vocal actor and the "I" of Sinatra's version had been emphasized due to the song's inclusion in a concept album told from the point of view of an obviously fictional narrator, here the song is removed from its context and personalized in a way that suggests two things about the singer. Firstly, she is describing her desire to sublimate the loss she feels with "some music I've got to do": on the one hand, "doing" the music will stop me from drifting into melancholy; on the other, I have to do it, it is what keeps me going (the song immediately preceding 'For a While' is Simone’s own composition, 'I Sing Just to Know that I'm Alive'). Secondly, she is recognizing that the losses of her life are ones she is far from being "over". Who or what is "you" in this case? Her autobiography would soon provide some possible answers: her father, the various men in her life, the civil rights movement, the denial of her childhood ambitions to be a concert pianist. In memory, as Freud pointed out, such events are likely to be conflated into a "single" moment. The "screen memory" Simone articulates with 'For a While' no doubt conflates many such episodes, as indeed it does for us as listeners projecting the song onto our own acoustic screens. Perhaps the "you" is Nina Simone herself: "I touch my hair and I touch my skin" suggests a self-realisation not unlike that described by Katherine Woodward in her analysis of ageing in Proust's work. Woodward calls this the "mirror stage" of old age. Perhaps the realization of who she was and who she could have been led Simone to a mourning of her own potential. We can read the documents of her late period – her autobiography, the documentary La Légende and her final albums – as attempts to find, via the mediation of memory in print, film and disc – a promise lost in time.
In 1993 Simone appropriated more Sinatra material, this time three songs from *A Man Alone*. 'A Single Woman', (her version of 'The Single Man'), 'Lonesome Cities', a tale of a sexual and geographical explorer, and 'Love's Been Good to Me', another song of experience about a roamer who has "never found a home" but is comforted by the memories of past loves. As Ntozake Shange noted in the album’s liner notes, it is worth dwelling on Nina Simone's love songs as much as on her more obviously "revolutionary" material:

*A Single Woman* is about love, all kinds of love. Especially, a full grown woman in love. A woman in the process of defining her life, deciding her fate, accepting, without shame or guilt, her own needs and desires. … Depending on how well we've been loved or not loved, these lyrics and the earned authority of Simone's voice will bring hope, reassurance, or the right to grieve.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, Simone's song may not have been one of victory but she produced many victorious moments, moments in which her artistry communicated unambiguous meaning to her audience. One of the most unambiguous messages it sent was that it we were always in danger of being too late to the show, that we were always going "too slow", that if we did not speed up and change our ways of thinking, living and loving, we could only expect a deserved apocalypse. Whether that fate was to "die like flies" or to suffer the limbo of unquenched desires and unrealized visions, Simone's music told of a time to come. In bringing together the time to come of the torch singer's desperate hope (a hope born of unrequited love) or the protest singer's vision of Messianic change, Simone adopted a late voice that included the kind of biographical aspects while also surpassing the biographical to take a reading of the "end times" in which she was living.

This late voice can be said to be a voice subject to chronology, but also a sound produced by a vocal actor. It is a voice that navigates the twisted routes of innocence and experience, that knows that the time goes but may not know where it goes. It is a voice that looks back and admits defeat, having recognized that "a dream deferred" will "dry up / like a raisin in the sun / Or fester like a sore" (Hughes 1995, 426). But the late voice is still, in Simone's case, an angry voice, one that will not go gently, which does not flinch but may sometimes sag from the weight of bearing witness. It is a voice which speaks of a wound which refuses to heal, that follows bearing witness with a baring of the soul, that imagines a different history, another Spring, that presents a future anteriority, a voice that comes from after now, from an "archaeology of the future" (Jameson 2005), a voice that visits the present to "abduct" its listeners to the promise of the future (Eshun 1998). It is, finally, a voice still able to put a spell on its listeners.