



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Willie Thomas Harris play scripts**

1951-1984

Sc MG 613

Home to Harlem Project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

## Summary

**Creator:** Harris, Willie Thomas

**Title:** Willie Thomas Harris play scripts

**Date:** 1951-1984

**Size:** 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

**Source:** Gift, Sharon Harris, 1997

**Revision History:** This finding aid was updated by Allison Hughes.

**Abstract:** Collection consists of eighteen play scripts and one film script. With the exception of one play which was published in Paris, in French, all plays are unpublished. Titles for three act plays include: "Leedsville," 1951 (carbon copy, with minor corrections); two versions of "The end of the search" (one of the copies lacks the t.p., the date is unknown, and bears handwritten corrections, alterations, and additions. The second copy is dated 1953. Ultimately this play was rewritten as a novel); "A star for Bella," 1956; two copies of "Sounds in the alley," 1964 (the typewritten draft of the play with handwritten corrections, and its final typewritten version); two versions of "God takes the late train," 1964 (carbon copy draft with handwritten alterations, and its final typewritten version); "Not a single blade of grass," 1966 (carbon copy); "The blood of the starches," 1969.

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**Preferred citation:** [Item], Willie Thomas Harris play scripts, Sc MG 613, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound (MIRS) Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at [schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org](mailto:schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org) or 212-491-2270.

## Creator History

Playwright. Willie Thomas Harris was born in Birmingham, Alabama. Harris studied painting at the Art Students League for one year (1948-1949), after which he transferred to Columbia University where he majored in creative writing and studied playwriting for four years (1951-1955). After leaving the University he completed four full length plays which were produced in Los Angeles, 1961, and in Madison, Wisconsin, 1963. Harris left the United States in the mid-sixties, and lived in Europe from 1965 to 1978. He resided in Paris, France, where he wrote several plays, three of which were translated to French by Pierre Roudy. "The beginning of the marathon," a play for children, was produced in Paris by O.R.T.F. (Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française), and published under the title "L'autre marathon."

Willie Thomas Harris also experimented with the novel form and wrote three novels: "The end of the search," 1971, "Ston's Gym and Club," 1973, and "Out of buzzard roost," 1978, all unpublished. In 1978, he returned to the United States where he continued to write full length plays, and a film script, "To the bayou winds." "Not a single blade of grass," produced at the 18th Street Playhouse, won the Theater of Renewal Award for Best Play, 1986. Willie Thomas Harris died in 1989.

## Scope and Content Note

Collection consists of eighteen play scripts and one film script. With the exception of one play which was published in Paris, in French, all plays are unpublished. Titles for three act plays include: "Leedsville," 1951 (carbon copy, with minor corrections); two versions of "The end of the search" (one of the copies lacks the t.p., the date is unknown, and bears handwritten corrections, alterations, and additions. The second copy is dated 1953. Ultimately this play was rewritten as a novel); "A star for Bella," 1956; two copies of "Sounds in the alley," 1964 (the typewritten draft of the play with handwritten corrections, and its final typewritten version); two versions of "God takes the late train," 1964 (carbon copy draft with handwritten alterations, and its final typewritten version); "Not a single blade of grass," 1966 (carbon copy); "The blood of the starches," 1969. |||Titles for two act plays are: "A cross at the edge of the sword," 1968 (carbon copy with handwritten corrections); "An actor in tragi-color," 1982 (carbon copy with handwritten alterations and additions); two versions of "Not a single blade of grass," 1982 and 1983 (a condensation of the full length play, mentioned above); "A lantern for Crispus," 1984 (carbon copy with minor corrections). Titles for one act plays are: "Tue ton prochain comme toi-même," n.d. (the French translation of "The roar of a distant canon," 1967, by Pierre Roudy); "The beginning of the marathon," 1968, and its French translation, "L'autre marathon," by Pierre Roudy, published in 1971, by Magnard, Paris; "The beginning of something," 1968; and three plays, written in 1978, under the leading title "Harlem nocturne": "The wine party," "Killer of the food," and "Not a single blade of grass," (another shorter version of the play mentioned above). Two titles for musicals: three folders of "Harlem in Paree," 1977 (script, lyrics, and scores); "Our side of town," 1982. A film script: "To the bayou winds," 1982. Collection also includes a folder of Harris's correspondence relating to the production of "Not a single blade of grass," and a few theater reviews about its presentation by the 18th Street Playhouse.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American authors  
African American dramatists  
American drama -- 20th century

American drama -- African American authors  
Authors -- United States  
Black author  
Dramatists, American -- 20th century

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scores (documents for music)  
Screenplays  
Scripts

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical Statement - List of Works  
"Not a Single Blade of Grass" 1966-1983
- b. 1 f. 2 1983  
Two-act play.
- b. 1 f. 3 1982  
Two-act play.
- b. 1 f. 4 1966  
Three-act play.
- b. 1 f. 5 Showcase
- b. 1 f. 6 "Leedsville Acres" 1951  
Three-act play. Missing last scene Act III.
- b. 1 f. 7-8 "The End of the Search" 1953  
Three-act play.
- b. 1 f. 9 "A Lantern for Crispus" 1984  
Two-act play.
- b. 1 f. 10 "A Star for Bella" 1956  
Three-act play.
- b. 1 f. 11-12 "Sounds in the Alley" 1964  
Three-act play.
- b. 2 f. 1-2 "God Takes the Late Train" 1964  
Three-act play.
- b. 2 f. 3 "A Cross at the Edge of the Sword" 1968  
Two-act play.
- b. 2 f. 4 "Tue ton Prochain Comme Toi-Meme"  
One-act play. French translation of "The roar of a distant canon" (1967) by Pierre Roudy.
- b. 2 f. 5 "The Blood of the Starches" 1969  
Three-act play.
- b. 2 f. 6 "An Actor in Tragi-Color" 1982  
Two-act play.
- b. 2 f. 7 "To the Bayou Winds" 1982  
Film script.
- b. 2 f. 8 "Our Side of Town" 1982  
Musical.
- b. 2 f. 9-11 "Harlem in Paree" 1977  
Musical.
- b. 2 f. 12 "The Beginning of the Marathon" 1968  
One-act play. With French translation, "L'autre marathon," by Pierre Roudy, published in 1971 by Magnard, Paris.
- b. 2 f. 13 "The Beginning of Something" 1968  
One-act play.
- b. 2 f. 14 *Harlem Nocturne: "The Wine Party," "Killer of the Food," "Not a Single Blade of Grass"* 1978  
Three one-act plays.