

# double order: the spectrum of black aesthetics

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Few of those who speak to the issue of a Black literary aesthetic are tentative: "The Black Artist's role in America," announces LeRoi Jones, "is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. . . . The Black Artist must teach the White Eyes their deaths, and teach the black man how to bring these deaths about."<sup>1</sup> Not so, claims Ralph Ellison: "I can only ask that my fiction be judged as art; if it fails, it fails aesthetically, not because I did or did not fight some ideological battle."<sup>2</sup> But can Black art be judged—in an era of revolutionary turmoil—simply as art? Can ideological commitments be avoided? The battle lines would seem to be drawn, the polarities established.

White critics, expectedly, have not shunned this major critical controversy. For the most part, they gather around the position maintained by Ellison and condemn politically engaged literature. Marcus Klein, for example, in *After Alienation* speaks with confidence: "There are matters that a Negro author must explore and must articulate because others won't, because he knows and others do not, and because he is an instrument of Negro destiny."<sup>3</sup> Yet in spite of his relationship with Negro destiny, Klein is clear that the artist must avoid the "screech and roar of political implication," which apparently necessitates "sacrifices of honesty, profundity, personality, the real complexity of anyone's experience"; thus, for Klein, "protest as a literary genre has little flexibility, no subtlety, and circumscribed possibilities" (p. 73). Moreover, Klein is sure that "all serious Negro novelists and poets" are determined "to free Negro literature from propaganda, to give it room in a wider reality" (p. 76). Robert Bone, in *The Negro Novel in America*, agrees; he disapproves of "crude nationalistic propaganda,"<sup>4</sup> insists on "freedom for the Negro artist" (that is, "freedom to create without succumbing to the demands of racial propaganda" [p. 249]), proclaims that "the Negro novelist must achieve universality" (p. 2), and decides that "it is art, in the long run, that matters" (p. 7).

It is not difficult to provide examples of Black art which would earn the stern disapproval of critics like Klein and Bone, art which deliberately chooses to ignore flexibility, subtlety or universality. The opening lines of Bobb Hamilton's "Brother Harlem Bedford Watts Tells Mr. Charlie Where Its At"<sup>5</sup> roar with political implications:

Man, your whole history  
Ain't been nothing but a hustle;  
You're a three card melly  
Mother fucker.  
You've even run the shell  
And pea game on your own family.  
I wouldn't trust you  
As far as I could throw  
a turd of  
Gnat shit!  
Let me run down  
Just a little  
                  of my  
Case against you  
Chuck!  
When you set your  
Feet in our house,  
Our troubles begun— . . . .

Here, art serves a therapeutic function; the expression of frustration and rage both lessens the pent-up tension of the poet and, presumably, moves the reader to some sort of committed response. It has a kind of "universality," in so far as it articulates the mood of all oppressed people; but it does not aspire to an intellectual concept of a wider reality that transcends racial focus. And why should it? If art is to have any meaning, let alone relevance, it must be able to serve many masters. *Must* Black artists lower their voices to appease those critics who are made nervous by a rigidly ethnic appeal? Edward Margolies, in *Native Sons*, implies that they must. Margolies contends that "articulation and communication require a common American response,"<sup>6</sup> and deplures poets like LeRoi Jones who have degenerated into "a kind of fretful hysteria," "a mono-maniacal obsession," and "fragments of fantasy, feeling, and ideas tossed together in a whirlpool of hysteria" (pp. 194, 195). Is self-control the most significant aesthetic criterion? Clearly, for a great deal of current Black art, it is not.

Yet it is for Herbert Hill, who sums up many of these critical stances. "Negro writers," he happily informs us, "are now moving into new areas of involvement with fundamental social issues that go beyond the race question into an awareness of the tragedy, irony and absurdity of American and twentieth-century life."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, "for these writers simple protest and anger are not enough and rhetoric will not be useful in masking the inadequacies of literary craftsmanship" (p. xxii). If Negro artists follow Hill's advice and "protest not only against the racial

situation but against all the forces and conditions of life that artists and writers everywhere must protest against," then they will inevitably produce "the stuff of great literature" (p. xxii). For Hill, such possibilities, as they become realities, carry with them comforting critical advantages:

Thus, the perennial debate about the conflict between art and ideology has become an exercise in futility. For the serious writer there must be a fundamental connection between artistic means, that is, technique and discipline, with social and moral conviction, and a recognition of the significant relationship between individual freedom and social necessity, between form and content. . . .

The urgencies of social protest cannot be invoked, as they have been in the past, as an excuse for shoddy undisciplined writing. For writing without artistic quality can only lead to dull and ineffective protest literature. Such writing is in fact neither protest nor literature, it is only an act of self-indulgence, an expression of rage and little else. It makes no impact on the real world and is of doubtful value as a cathartic. Indeed, for the writer, a serious and purposeful commitment to racial justice and social action requires the most intense devotion to literary technique and artistic discipline. (pp. xiv, xv)

The critic's job, then, becomes relatively easy: concentrate on the literary technique and artistic discipline, deplore self-indulgent rage, and the distinction between great literature and shoddy undisciplined writing will be immediately apparent. Yet anger has its place, and one of the most exciting aspects of contemporary art is its challenge of the criteria for serious literature; in their own ways, Bobb Hamilton and LeRoi Jones are highly disciplined and very serious poets.

The inadequacies of Hill's response are tentatively suggested by David Littlejohn. In *Black on White*, he describes the ways in which White critics seek to avoid the frustration of an honest confrontation with Black art:

The last, the most sophisticated escape, in such cases, is through "literary" judgment: It's poorly done. Amen. End of problem. One tends to fall back on this last evasion (if it is an evasion) quite frequently in the case of the more militant Negro literature: It isn't literature. Propaganda with a plot (or in rhyme, or in acts). Unconvincing; lifeless; unearned; unfelt; uncrafted. Such criticisms *are* often only illicit self-defenses against pain; a reader slips on the rubber gloves of criticism to avoid the sting.<sup>8</sup>

Impressive candor, perhaps. But such criticism, for Littlejohn, is not necessarily evasion, and most Black literature he judges unconvincing, lifeless, unearned, unfelt, clearly uncrafted. A brief look at his likes and dislikes reveals his real critical standards. Only with Richard Wright does "serious American Negro literature" emerge, "literature that need

not be qualified or justified or apologized for" (p. 21). Charles Chesnutt, for example, is clearly "very small beer" (p. 27). Claude McKay? "The more thoroughly one studies his work, the more disagreeably McKay is revealed as the small-souled declamatory propagandist we meet in his novels," and "his weakness lies in his smallmindedness and poetic inability" (p. 57). It isn't literature. Black art does not fare well even after 1940, for Richard Wright is at best "a *necessary* voice, crude and unpleasant like a siren" (p. 103). Littlejohn slips on his own rubber gloves and looks for "generosity, objectivity, magnanimity, and art" in works following *Native Son*; he finds, for the most part, "subjective, small-souled, belligerent, and artless Negro novels" (p. 141). Amen. End of probem. The writers he is partly able to approve of all share devotion to craftsmanship: Gwendolyn Brooks is "far more a poet than a Negro" and is "totally dedicated to her craft," manifesting "objective and exquisite detachment" (p. 89); Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is "the supreme work of art created by an American Negro," for its author is, naturally, "at least as much an artist as a Negro" (p. 110); and his favorite Black novelist, Ann Petry, displays the saving virtue of "a universality of creative sympathy that is honestly Shakespearean" (p. 156). For Littlejohn, the best of Black art is that which is least Black. In fact, he would have us believe that "the finest, most understanding piece of race war literature" is E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (p. 167). Such criticisms, in their deliberately smallminded refusal to confront the racial consciousness of Black literature, are in some way illicit.

Certainly, the criteria of these generally respected White critics (the emphasis on craftsmanship and universality, the contempt for literary postures of rage) have received considerable support from major Black writers. Albert Murray seems to echo Littlejohn when he expresses his own doubts: "The sad fact," he says, "is that there is very little to show that very many U.S. Negro writers have ever actually tried to write major novels."<sup>9</sup> That is, Negro authors have not been sufficiently serious. Richard Wright? Although Murray grants that he was "a sophisticated intellectual," Wright made the appalling mistake of choosing "to operate within the framework of his basic political commitment. This," Murray confides, "was an unfortunate choice" (p. 133). Albert Murray, also a sophisticated intellectual, much prefers Ralph Ellison—who presented in *Invisible Man* not an example of Black rage, but "a prototypical story about being not only a twentieth-century American but also a twentieth-century man, the Negro's *obvious* predicament symbolizing everybody's *essential* predicament" (p. 136). The echoes of Herbert Hill are apparent. The implications are again obvious: everybody's essential predicament makes up the stuff of great literature; the Negro's obvious predicament involves basic political commitments and clearly inferior art forms. The suggestion is that "blackness" is best suited as a

metaphor for certain aspects of the basic human condition, what Melville so famously referred to as "the power of blackness" in distinctly nonracial terms.

James Baldwin has leant artistic support to this emphasis:

In America, the color of my skin had stood between myself and me; in Europe, that barrier was down. Nothing is more desirable than to be released from an affliction, but nothing is more frightening than to be divested of a crutch. It turned out that the question of who I was was not solved because I had removed myself from the social forces which menaced me—anyway, these forces had become interior, and I had dragged them across the ocean with me. The question of who I was had at last become a personal question, and the answer was to be found in me.<sup>10</sup>

Blackness becomes a barrier; identity becomes a purely personal (and, then, by implication, universal) question; the forces which menace become interior, nonracial. Turning inward, divesting himself of the crutch of Black consciousness, the artist allies himself with world culture. Abraham Chapman sees this movement as a potentially redeeming direction for Black art:

The personal and private, the ethnic and racial which are the products of common social and historical experiences, and the universal, are not separate and warring categories, but are all fused in the individual personality, outlook and vision of life. Understood in this sense the racial feeling or consciousness of the poet is not something which separates him from the rest of humanity but an organic part of his distinctive and individual sense of life.<sup>11</sup>

If such were in fact the case, Herbert Hill's claim that "the perennial debate about the conflict between art and ideology has become an exercise in futility," might well be justified. After all, many critics have attempted to demonstrate that this conclusion is reached by Ellison's *Invisible Man*, who announces in the closing lines of that novel, "Who knows, but that on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"<sup>12</sup> "Ellison's private truth," Robert Bone contends, "is that his color threatens constantly to deprive him of individuality; the public truth to which this corresponds is that all men have been deprived of individuality in the machine age. Invisibility is Ellison's symbol for this loss of self."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the narrator is released from the affliction of race by identifying his malady with the sufferings of "all men." Or is that simply what the White reader needs to believe? Is Ellison's narrator "puttin' on ole massa," following his grandfather's deathbed advice: "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."<sup>14</sup> Is Ellison himself playing on the predictable response of his White audience?

Whether or not Ellison is boring from within, overcoming them with yeses, he has gone out of his way to encourage nonracial responses to his art. Reinforcing Bone's analysis, Ellison insists, "The hero's invisibility is not a matter of being seen, but a refusal to run the risk of his own humanity, which involves guilt. This is not an attack upon white society!"<sup>15</sup>

Speaking more generally, Ellison objects to those "Negroes [who] have been trying to define their own predicament in exclusively sociological terms, a situation I consider quite short-sighted." Richard Wright, who is so often a test case on this issue, is seen by Ellison as "overcommitted to ideology." "No," Ellison continues, "Wright was no spiritual father of mine, certainly in no sense I recognize." Thus:

Wright believed in the much abused idea that novels are "weapons"—the counterpart of the dreary notion, common among most minority groups, that novels are instruments of good public relations. But I believe that true novels, even when most pessimistic and bitter, arise out of an impulse to celebrate human life and therefore are ritualistic and ceremonial at their core. Thus they would preserve as they destroy, affirm as they reject.

Ellison claims to have gone through considerable struggle "to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race," and is quite prepared to affirm that "one's racial identity is, after all, accidental."<sup>16</sup> Like Baldwin, Littlejohn and Bone, he prefers to opt for Serious Literature, avoiding the full implications of confronting his accidental racial identity.

"The things that concerned Ellison are interesting to read, but contemporary black youth feels another force in the world today. We know who we are, and we are not invisible, *at least not to each other*. We are not Kafkaesque creatures stumbling through a white light of confusion and absurdity. The light is black (now, get that!) as are most of the meaningful tendencies in the world."<sup>17</sup> So writes Larry Neal, and in spite of Herbert Hill's complacent assumption that the perennial debate has become an exercise in futility, another force seems to be carrying the argument forward, and in the process producing exciting art. Black art today, claims James T. Stewart, "is revolutionary by definition."<sup>18</sup> And the Black artist, he adds, "must construct models which correspond to his own reality. The models must be non-white. Our models must be consistent with a black style, our natural aesthetic styles, and our moral and spiritual styles" (p. 3).

A natural aesthetic style; a Black style; a life style. The language of this new Black consciousness tends to be vague, perhaps necessarily so. Melvin Dixon gropes toward a kind of nondefinition:

In search of a black aesthetics we need only to look to ourselves. We must probe the depths of the black soul and

unleash the wild wings of the black spirit. Its flight will lead us forever onward and upward to a greater aesthetic appreciation of the free black spirit.

The aesthetics of black art come from within. It is the internal made external. For within the creative psyche of the black artist, who must be deep into the reality of his own existence, is born the essence of black aesthetics from its union with community. It is thus the internal consciousness of the black artist from whence comes the sole standard, if you will, of his art. . . .

The viability, then, of a black aesthetics, or the art of black life, can only be appreciated in the truest sense by its function. It must LIVE! . . . It is functional, active, alive—for a true black aesthetics lives in every black man. It walks, talks, eats, and sleeps with every black man. It is the essence of black existence. It is the SOUL!<sup>19</sup>

It is important to distinguish the internal movement Dixon refers to from that described by James Baldwin. Baldwin discovered interior forces and thereby hoped to escape the affliction of social forces; Dixon's artist turns inward only to re-establish his union with community—he finds not that which blurs his racial identity and links him to universal mankind; he finds Black soul. This emphasis on the metaphysical dimensions of Black consciousness is becoming increasingly characteristic. "The Black Arts movement," says Larry Neal, "is rooted in a spiritual ethic. In saying that the function of art is to liberate Man, we propose a function for art which is now dead in the West and which is in keeping with our most ancient traditions and with our needs. Because, at base, art is religious and ritualistic; and ritual moves to liberate Man and to connect him to the Greater Forces."<sup>20</sup>

A curious irony is evident: Neal invokes ancient Black traditions, even as the spiritually oriented aesthetic he proposes is well within a rich American (White) tradition. Larry Neal insists that the artist must "move people to a deeper understanding of what this thing is all about, be a kind of priest, a black magician, working juju with the word on the world"<sup>21</sup>; more than one hundred and twenty-five years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson put it this way:

. . . the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth. . . .

The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. . . .

The sign and credentials of the poet are, that he announces that which no man foretold. He is the true and only doctor; he knows and tells. . . .

The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune. For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.<sup>22</sup>

Neal's artist works juju with the word, tells us how it was with him, and the Black community will be richer in his fortune. Although militant Black critics would be, undoubtedly, loath to admit it, most of their revolutionary aesthetic was anticipated by the White, nineteenth-century New Englander who noted that "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" and who proclaimed that "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."<sup>23</sup>

Of course, there is a difference. Black poets are not likely to wander into the woods in the hopes of coming upon hidden rhodoras; the Greater Forces are racial, linked to Black brotherhood, quite unlike the Emersonian Oversoul.

Reflections  
face to face  
(with shattered waves)  
break  
into a fragile smile  
  
behind the sun  
is behind the moon  
is behind the universe  
is behind the God—  
  
that  
rest on a deep red sea:  
  
In one cool June  
hell broke out  
and tears  
put out fires.

In this fragile poem, "Riot,"<sup>24</sup> Randolph Singleton reminds us that behind God the fire still rages, that Beauty is not simply its own excuse for being, that the Greater Forces reflect the tears of concrete Black people. The art demonstrates the attempt to join the physical suffering to metaphysical consciousness of soul; the Black poet, as Dixon said, moves both inward and outward, always reaffirming his union with community. The relationship between the poet and his people is inevitably delicate, often difficult. Albert Drake, in "The Poet Miscast as Protector,"<sup>25</sup> projects "the serial hazards" which "unfold/where I am cast a concerned/but clumsy hero attempting/a divine intervention to win":

I would shelter you warm  
keep you from harm  
perform spectacular heroics  
all from love—even though  
I know there is a day certain  
as science, absolute as the law  
of the hours: when  
if you do not stand in my wake  
then I must stand in yours.



Complementing such gentle spiritual dilemmas is a far more militantly harsh outcry; as Don Lee says, “i ain’t seen no poems stop a .38,/ i ain’t seen no stanzas break a honkie’s head,/i ain’t seen no metaphors stop a tank.”<sup>26</sup> “The artist and the political activist are one,” Larry Neal insists; “Both understand and manipulate the collective myths of the race. Both are warriors, priests, lovers and destroyers.”<sup>27</sup> Le Graham, in “The Black Narrator: At a Symposium for Afro-Americans,” assumes the role of warrior-destroyer and suggests how moving rage can be:

1

White poems  
are daggers. guns. cops.  
    piercing hearts in weird design. Ofays  
    beating niggers to their knees. Coloured  
    girls with wigs passing & cutting Afro’s  
    mind. Or black poems judged by whitey’s  
    standards. 11:45 & still no ring (eastern  
standard time. owned by grey cats on mainline U.S.A.)  
These poems are such things. pointed. like twist drills  
    parting tools. I know  
the creator  
    (in classroom faces. human relationship meetings  
morning greetings as a habit. a state of mind after a work-  
shop on blackism)

2

Black poems are beautiful  
egyptian princesses. afro-americans. john o. killens. ossie  
    davis. leroi jones. mal  
    colm x shabazz. robert  
    williams. lumumba. A  
poem for wooly-haired brothers. natural-haired sisters.  
Bimbos. boots & woogies. Or nappy-headed youngsters  
    Cause they want what i  
    want: blood from revolutions. A  
    fast boat to Africa. ghana  
    the cameroons uganda &  
    nigeria . . .

3

Here in america i want black thoughts. in forms of con  
crete skies  
tumbling down  
on dingy ofays. on negro  
middleclass heads (konked-haired hipsters, wig-wearing  
    whores. sophisticated teachers. inspiring professors  
    . . . schooled in propaganda)  
Crush their minds & lives thoughts. Talk to them in chinese  
    vietnamese  
    or  
    black language  
Fuck their minds up. cross-cut & rip-saw  
their ideas. in

ugly design. improper  
balance. Yeah.  
using black primitive standards.<sup>28</sup>

Black art, then, need not be judged by White viewpoints, may speak movingly to brothers and sisters, may reflect Black primitive standards. But what makes these standards distinctly “black” and “primitive”? Carolyn Rodgers insists that “To start sentences with capitals, to end sentences with periods/to use commas etc etc etc reeks of a higher subtler more/destructive order.”<sup>29</sup> She objects to “the colonizers language,” to “correctness, learnedness” which is only “intensified oppression,” and opts for what might appear as “nonsense to create/newsense.” Thus far, young Black poets are searching for open forms, free of the traditional restrictions of grammar and punctuation, drawing on the natural rhetoric and metaphors of the community (e.g., Le Graham’s reference to “ofays,” “gray cats,” “nappy-headed,” etc.). Although the printed results of such experimentation may appear overly contrived, even gimmicky, anyone who has heard Don Lee (to select only the best known example) *read* his poetry must agree that the new balance is more than simply fretful hysteria or an act of paralyzing self-indulgence. New experiences are indeed unfolding, new confessions are therefore required, and the entire community (Black and White) will be richer for their expression.

The development of LeRoi Jones’ critical stances recapitulates the spectrum of Black aesthetics. In 1962, he struggled with the “almost agonizing mediocrity” of Negro literature; he saw middle-class morality a precondition of all “cultivated art” and preferred the primitive standards he was not yet ready to define.<sup>30</sup> He seemed quite close to Ellison’s position when he described the function of “high art”:

High art, first of all, must reflect the experiences of the human being, the emotional predicament of the man, as he exists, in the defined world of his being. It must be produced from the legitimate resources of the soul in the world. It can *never* be produced by evading these resources or pretending that they do not exist. It can never be produced by appropriating the withered emotional responses of some strictly social idea of humanity. High art, and by this I mean any art that would attempt to describe or characterize some portion of the profound meaningfulness of human life with any finality or truth, cannot be based on the superficialities of human existence. It must issue from *real* categories of human activity, *truthful* accounts of human life, and not fancied accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege by some willingly preposterous apologists for one social “order” or another. Most of the formal literature produced by Negroes in America has never fulfilled these conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Like so many others, White and Black alike, Jones protested vehemently against protest-oriented art, opting for something far more abstract,

something reflecting ultimate, universal, profound meaningfulness. The scholarly tone, the refined rhetoric, the careful absence of a racially distinct voice—all these reflect Jones' involvement in then-acceptable critical attitudes. The passage just quoted might just as well have been written by Robert Bone or Edward Margolies; his concept of High Art was not basically different from Herbert Hill's criteria for the Stuff of Great Literature. Still, there was some difference: Jones looked for a literature which would be "a legitimate product of the Negro experience in America" and which would "get at that experience in exactly the terms America has proposed for it, in its most ruthless identity."<sup>32</sup> He had not yet worked out a critical tone sufficiently ruthless to capture that experience in his prose.

By 1963, he had moved closer to a more radical position, closer to home: "If I fill a book up with 8,000,000 white people," he wrote, "it is still Negro material; a Negro put them there, colored them (white) with the pigment of his experience. And whether or not I label each page 'written by a coon,' the fact of the thing is that each page, and the experience, etc. on the page, was collected by that coon too. And, finally, it is my world, too. Get to that."<sup>33</sup> Jones was beginning to sound like someone who was not simply everyone else; he was prepared to accept Blackness as something more than a metaphor for human existence.

By 1965, he was ready to engage his criticism; he no longer worried about appropriating a social idea of humanity. Gone was the formal gesture toward high art, the vaguely abstract concern with the emotional predicament of Man; Black togetherness dominates. This is the entire last chapter of *Home*:

state/meant

The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil.

The Black Artist must draw out of his soul the correct image of the world. He must use this image to band his brothers and sisters together in common understanding of the nature of the world (and the nature of America) and the nature of the human soul.

The Black Artist must demonstrate sweet life, how it differs from the deathly grip of the White Eyes. The Black Artist must teach the White Eyes their deaths, and teach the black man how to bring these deaths about.

We are unfair, and unfair.  
We are black magicians, black art  
s we make in black labs of the heart.

The fair are  
fair, and death  
ly white.

The day will not save them  
and we own  
the night.

Most recently, Jones has moved his criticism almost completely into the fragmented expressiveness of his poetry. He shares the mysticism of Larry Neal, the concern for the sweet life in tune with Great Forces. Both insist on an aesthetic which reflects a life style, expressed in language which is internally meaningful:

What does aesthetic mean? A theory in the ether.  
Shdn't it mean for us Feelings about reality! The degree  
of in to self registration Intuit. About REality. In to  
selves. Many levels of feeling comprehension. About  
reality.

We are our feeling. We are our feelings ourselves.  
Our selves are our feelings. . . .

The breakthru the break out the move New ness New  
forms Explorations Departures all with the responsibility  
to force and be change all with the committment to Black  
Revolution, utilizing the collective spirit of Blackness.<sup>34</sup>

This is truly ritualistic criticism; it is not intended to produce pondered intellectualizations, formally logical constructions, reasoned insights. It is intended to move. For many, it undoubtedly does.

Somehow, an understanding of Black art must be predicated upon an acceptance of all dimensions of Black aesthetics; somehow, a critical response must be able to encompass both Ralph Ellison and LeRoi Jones. The emotional impact of the one does not negate the structured artifacts of the other; one should be able to appreciate both in a complementary relationship. Artistic validity is not dependent upon the assumptions of one extreme or the other; the foolish critic is he who would judge one artist by the criteria of another. More than half a century ago, W. E. B. DuBois wrote of "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."<sup>36</sup> DuBois felt that the most necessary goal for the Black man was "to merge his double self into a better and truer self," for he saw the conflict as one involving racially distinct identities. A kind of double-consciousness endures—in terms of the function and province of Black art: whether it should explore the human condition or the specifically Black awareness, whether it should emphasize craftsmanship or Black soul. Such a duality need not be resolved away; there is ample room for both. It need not be destruc-

tive, so long as critics and artists are able to recognize the different aspirations and methods of their fellow workers. Moreover, the spectrum of Black consciousness can and does provide the forum for worthwhile critical exploration; it can and does provide the subject matter for substantial Black art.

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## footnotes

1. LeRoi Jones, *Home* (New York: Apollo Edition, 1965), 251-252.
2. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Signet Edition, 1966), 142.
3. Marcus Klein, *After Alienation* (New York: Meridian Edition, 1962), 72.
4. Robert Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale Paperbound Edition, 1965), 254.
5. Larry Neal and LeRoi Jones, eds., *Black Fire* (New York: Apollo Edition, 1969), 447.
6. Edward Margolies, *Native Sons* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Edition, 1969), 192.
7. Herbert Hill, *Anger, and Beyond* (New York: Perennial Library Edition, 1966), xxi-xxii.
8. David Littlejohn, *Black on White* (New York: Viking Compass Edition, 1966), 12-13.
9. Albert Murray, "Something Different, Something More," *Anger, and Beyond*, 128.
10. James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dell Edition, 1961), 11.
11. Abraham Chapman, "Black Poetry Today," *Arts in Society*, V (Fall-Winter, 1968), 403.
12. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Signet Edition, 1952), 503.
13. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America*, 197.
14. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 19-20.
15. Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 179-180.
16. *Ibid.*, 35, 34, 124, 121, xvii, 261.
17. Larry Neal, "And Shine Swam On," *Black Fire*, 652.
18. James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," *Black Fire*, 10.
19. Melvin Dixon, "Black Theatre: The Aesthetics," *Negro Digest*, XVIII (July, 1969), 41, 42.
20. Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," *Ebony*, XXIV (August, 1969), 56.
21. Neal and Jones, *Black Fire*, 655.
22. "The Poet," *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Signet Edition, 1965), 308, 309, 314-315.
23. *Ibid.*, 260.
24. Randolph Singleton, "Riot," *Negro Digest*, XVIII (September, 1969), 29.
25. Albert Drake, "The Poet Miscast as Protector," *Arts in Society*, V (Fall-Winter, 1968), 476.
26. Don Lee, *Black Pride* (Detroit: Broadside Press Edition, 1968), 21.
27. Neal and Jones, *Black Fire*, 656.
28. Quoted in Stephen Henderson, "Survival Motion," *The Militant Black Writer*, Mercer Cook and Stephen Henderson, eds., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press Edition, 1969), 76-78.
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30. Jones, *Home*, 105.
31. *Ibid.*, 109.
32. *Ibid.*, 113.
33. *Ibid.*, 163-164.
34. Larry Neal, "The Black Aesthetic," *Negro Digest*, XVIII (September, 1969), 5-6.
35. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Edition, 1965), 215.