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The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry

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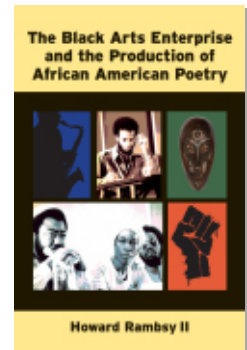
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4 • All Aboard the Malcolm-Coltrane Express

A survey of the hundreds of poems published in literary magazines and anthologies, as well as the varied and large number of poems appearing in individual volumes of poetry, would reveal an aesthetically diverse and expansive picture of African American poetry published during the 1960s and 1970s. The poems that readers are regularly exposed to in anthologies and magazines containing black poetry actually constitute a relatively small sampling of the literary art produced during the era. In fact, reviewing all of Amiri Baraka's and Nikki Giovanni's poems published in their individual volumes of poetry as opposed to their anthologized poems reveals that most readers have always been presented with a limited view of the writings of these widely known poets. Thus, describing all the features of black arts era poetry would be an overwhelming task, a task that is definitely beyond the scope of this project. Given the overall focus on modes of transmission and socialization in this study, the principal interest is in explaining how the widespread and repeated publication of particular kinds of poems gave a more definite shape to an overall view of African American poetry.

Certainly, black poets always constituted a group with divergent interests and modes of writing. However, the convergence of a diverse group of writers along the same routes suggested that they were exercising a form of poetic solidarity. Their decisions to concentrate on similar themes and techniques, in fact, were integral to the view of interconnectivity that characterized their artistic enterprise. The interrelated approaches taken by black poets during the 1960s and 1970s reveal how they established a more definite shape for their movement. Tribute poems and elegies devoted to African American political leaders, activists, writers, and musicians were especially prevalent during the time period.


Memorializing deceased historical figures as black exemplars, poets expressed their political and cultural allegiances, and they also provided audiences with ideas about those elements that were most worthy of emulation. Taken together, the tribute poems reveal the preoccupation among a large number of poets with constructing positive African American images. "Image is a term which we are using more and more in the black community," wrote Carolyn Gerald, "because we are discovering that the image we have of ourselves controls what we are capable of doing."¹ The presentation of affirmative portrayals was done "to destroy the zero and negative image-myths of ourselves by turning them inside out" (Gerald, "Black Writer and His Role," 354). In his poem "A Different Image," Dudley Randall writes that the 1960s required "this task: / create / a different image; / re-animate / the mask."² Accordingly, tribute poems enabled writers to "re-animate the mask" or to counter negative images by producing more positive portrayals of African Americans.

Members of the older generations of poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Robert Hayden, to name a few, had published tributes and elegies prior to the 1960s. However, the proliferation of texts during the black arts era made these poems even more widely available. The militant tone of the tributes and elegies were also a distinguishing factor. In the process of paying homage to jazz musicians, for instance, poets accentuated the rebellious, nationalist, and transformative spirits of the music. In his poem "Jazz Is My Religion," Ted Joans celebrates an "Afroamerican" musical form that was created "as a weapon to battle our blues!"³ In his poem "Elvin Jones: Jazz Drummer," Etheridge Knight explains that Max Roach "has fire and steel in his hands," and through his playing, the drummer "calls us all."⁴ Sarah Webster Fabio advances this chorus of jazz homage in her poem "Tribute to Duke" by praising Duke Ellington for his contributions to the music. She writes, "Way back then, Man, / you were doing / your thing. / Blowing minds with / riffs capping / whimsical whiffs of / lush melody—/ changing minds / with moods and / modulations, / changing minds, / changing faces, / changing tunes, / changing changes."⁵

Paying tribute to activists and musicians enabled poets to convey to their readership their positions on the varied possibilities of liberation, self-determination, and black history. "In the work of poets to give us back our heroes and to provide us with new ones," explains Carolyn Gerald, musicians and political activists represented the "two types of black men" most often celebrated during the time period.⁶ Malcolm X

and John Coltrane, consequently, were the figures who most often recurred in African American verse. The frequency with which these two men were alluded to in black poetry suggest that writers had arrived at a tacit agreement about the value of making these extraordinary cultural figures the subject of their poems. Apparently, poets had gotten on board a kind of Malcolm-Coltrane express, utilizing the two men as vehicles for transmitting ideas about the movement's commitment to radical politics and creativity.

Elegizing St. Malcolm

Next to Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X stands as one of the most widely known and memorialized African Americans of the twentieth century. In fact, in African American discourse, the only martyr celebrated more frequently than Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X is Jesus Christ. Various poems, books, paintings, songs, history programs, documentaries, course syllabi, plays, movies, clothing, album covers, Web pages, and a U.S. stamp have all, in some way, served to memorialize the life of Malcolm. The different methods and media utilized to invoke memories of the leader reveal that groups of people have sought to remember Malcolm X by any and all means available. The figure of Malcolm appeared "more than any man any time anywhere" in 1960s literature, Carolyn Gerald observes.⁷ Even Malcolm's name provided for a striking visual referent in American letters. Julia Fields's poem "When That Which Is Perfect Is Come" contains a line that reads, "As long as /  / Get / My X."⁸ On the printed page, the X is printed in a larger font than the other letters in the poem. In addition to noting various textual concerns relating to the poem, Aldon Nielsen observes, "The advent of the X in Field's post-Malcolm poem signifies for us in ways that were unavailable before Malcolm X" (27). Just as Americans could no longer see the numbers "9-11" in quite the same way after September 10, 2001, the sign X came to connote new and distinctive meanings in the post-Malcolm era.

Malcolm gained national attention during the 1960s for his fiery speeches, his radical stances against antiblack racism, his black nationalist views, and ultimately his tragic death. Moreover, Malcolm won the hearts and imaginations of creative artists of the 1960s and 1970s, as his style, appearance, and ideology became prevalent points of reference throughout the discourse. The numerous elegies to Malcolm reveal that

poets made the slain leader a central figure in African American literary history in general. In her poem “Saint Malcolm,” Johari Amini closes by noting that Malcolm’s “word cauterizes our infection / unifying blackness.”⁹ The title of Amini’s poem indicates the reverence bestowed upon the leader, and the closing suggests how he inspired black nationality.

Malcolm came to represent a significant element in the aesthetics of black poetry and the formation of the Black Arts Movement. Literary histories, in fact, trace the movement’s origins to late February and early March 1965, when Amiri Baraka moved uptown to Harlem and co-founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School. “When Malcolm was murdered,” explains Baraka, “we felt that was the final open declaration of war on black people and we resolved to fight. The Harlem move was our open commitment to this idea.”¹⁰ Although African American writers were involved in organizing themselves and composing militant art before Malcolm X’s death, Baraka’s move to Harlem and the subsequent African American literary and cultural activism after that point are significant, especially considering the fact that the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School that Baraka and others founded gave the movement its name. In view of reflections by Baraka, the death of Malcolm provided impetus for the birth of the Black Arts Movement. Even a cursory survey of black arts era writings reveals the extent to which Malcolm figures prominently in the discourse.

Well-known anthologies such as *Black Fire*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, *The Black Poets*, edited by Dudley Randall, and *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, edited by Stephen Henderson, all contain poems, essays, or references in their introductions and afterwords that memorialize Malcolm X. Abraham Chapman’s edited collections *Black Voices* (1968) and *New Black Voices* (1972) include, respectively, an excerpt from Malcolm X’s autobiography and his coauthored “Statement of the Basic Aims and Objectives of the Organization of Afro-American Unity.” On the pages of literary magazines, such as *Negro Digest/Black World*, *Freedomways*, and the *Journal of Black Poetry*, writers often mentioned and invoked memories of Malcolm X, and images of the leader appeared in these and several other black arts publications, such as *Liberator*.

Allusions to Malcolm X also appeared in creative and critical prose of the era. In John A. Williams’s 1967 novel *The Man Who Cried I Am*, “Minister Q of the Black Muslims” is clearly inspired by Malcolm X. The narrator in John Oliver Killens’s 1971 novel *The Cotillion* makes reference to Malcolm throughout his story, often equating Malcolm with a

deity. At a point when no human knows what people are thinking, the narrator observes in passing that only God and Malcolm know.¹¹ At one point in a 1920s scene in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, a character predicts the coming of a Malcolm X figure: "Maybe I won't be around but someone is coming. I feel it stirring. He might even have the red hair of a conjure man but he won't be 1. No, he will get it across. And he will be known as the man who 'got it across.'"¹² The character in Reed's novel is apparently alluding to a younger Malcolm X, who had his hair conked and was known as "Detroit Red."

Keorapetse William Kgositsile comments in his essay "Brother Malcolm and the Black Revolution" on the various and multiple mentions of the slain leader and observes that Malcolm "is too many things to too many people."¹³ Actually, the idea that Malcolm is "too many things" perhaps helps make him such a useful site of inspiration for such a large number of poets. As discussed in chapter 2, *For Malcolm*, edited by Dudley Randall and Margaret Burroughs, published under Broadside Press, represents one of the most notable African American anthologies of the era. Randall and Burroughs's anthology demonstrates how Malcolm could serve as a poetic muse and a unifying force for a diverse range of poets. Given the visibility of *For Malcolm*, as well as its inclusion of so many prominent writers, aspirant poets would have certainly been inclined to consider Malcolm as a subject for their works as well.

Invoking the idea of Malcolm in their poems enabled poets to project a range of black nationalist aesthetics in their works. By focusing on Malcolm, poets covered issues such as black solidarity, liberation, and the development of radical identities. In her "Poems for Malcolm," Carolyn Rodgers closes with the request, "I want us to be a Black Nationhood Poem / for El Hajj Malik El Shabazz [Malcolm X]."¹⁴ Here Rodgers calls on fellow poets and general readers to develop a nationality in the name of Malcolm. Similarly, in her poem "How Long Has Trane Been Gone," Jayne Cortez imagines a day when black people will reside in "The State of Malcolm X."¹⁵ Similarly, James Emanuel writes in his poem "For Malcolm, U.S.A." that "Malcolm was / My native land."¹⁶ By envisioning Malcolm as a basis on which black people might establish a nation, these three poets further extend Malcolm's black nationalist ideology. They go beyond declaring the leader a chief proponent of black nationalism; they suggest that he is the very embodiment of the ideology.

The process of memorializing the slain leader led some black poets to "become" types of Malcolm. In his poem "Malcolm X—An Autobi-

ography,” Larry Neal adopts the persona of Malcolm and charts the leader’s life experiences. “I sprang out of the Midwestern plains / the bleak Michigan landscape, the black blues of Kansas / City, these kiss-me-nights; / out of the bleak Michigan landscape wearing the slave name / Malcolm Little,” Neal writes, alluding to Malcolm’s adolescent years.¹⁷ Later Neal discusses Malcolm’s experiences in the Northeast, when the leader was known as a conk-haired street hustler: “I am Big Red, tiger, vicious, Big Red, bad nigger, will kill.” Neal alludes to key biographical details and articulates Malcolm’s deep understanding and appreciation of black expressive culture. For instance, as he discusses Malcolm’s time in Harlem even before he converted to Islam, Neal reveals the leader’s developing radical consciousness: “I hear Billie sing, no good man, and dig Prez, wearing the Zoot / suit of life,” and “I understand the mystery of the Signifying Monkey” (316).

The Malcolm that Neal envisions bears a striking resemblance to the unnamed narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Like Ellison’s protagonist, the main figure of Neal’s poem is drawn to the complex ideas embedded in black music and African American expressivities in general. Neal’s Malcolm “digs” Lester ‘Prez’ Young, the saxophonist, wearing a Zoot suit with his stylish hat tilted to the right hip angle, in ways similar to Ellison’s main character digging a group of young men in Harlem wearing Zoot suits. According to Ellison, these stylish figures were “the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious.”¹⁸ Interestingly, part of what made Malcolm X such a dynamic leader and cultural *bearer of something precious* related to the fact that he had once been Detroit Red, one of those stylish “transitory” Harlemite cats like those described in *Invisible Man*. Neal’s poem closes with Malcolm in jail, as he recognizes his father’s connection to the “ghost of Garvey” and begins to adhere to the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Notably, Neal’s “autobiography” focuses less on Malcolm X’s more prominent stature as a 1960s black radical leader and instead showcases a younger Malcolm and his streetwise, hustler persona. As a result, Neal’s memorial expresses the idea that we can learn from the street hustler Malcolm as well as the minister. For Neal, the hip, hustling Malcolm stood as an important model for the radical potential of black style.¹⁹

While Neal takes on the first-person voice of the slain in his poem, a number of other poets emulated Malcolm in their public personas. Naming and renaming already carried particular resonance among African Americans and writers long before the presence of Malcolm X

on the national scene. However, his name changes from Little to X and then to Shabazz definitely helped popularize the notion of a black nationalist transformation in name and attitude. During the 1960s and 1970s, a range of poets changed their names: Johari Amini (Jewell Latimore), Ebon (Thomas Dooley), Haki Madhubuti (Don Lee), Marvin X (Marvin Jackmon), Kalamu ya Salaam (Val Ferdinand III), and Askia Muhammad Toure (Ronald Snellings). Apparently, black artists had something to gain by figuratively becoming like Malcolm in their public personas. For one, writers could celebrate or memorialize the life of Malcolm X and thus make known their own commitments to black radical views. Doing so could make them credible to their African American audiences with similar interests. Additionally, since Malcolm X had developed a considerable following, writers who aligned themselves with Malcolm could tap into an already established audience interested in Malcolm and black nationalist ideology. Finally, by taking on a Malcolm X–like persona, poets fashioned themselves in line with a proven and respected model. Thus, by incorporating Malcolm’s views and delivery styles into their works, poets gave the slain leader a prominent afterlife in African American literary history.

Part of what made Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, and Haki Madhubuti three of the most popular writers of the era had to do with the degree to which they echoed Malcolm in their works and public personas. As writer and editor Joe Goncalves observed in 1966, “If you want to grasp the importance of Malcolm X compare the late writings of Sonia Sanchez or Imamu [Amiri] Baraka with their early, pre-Malcolm works.”²⁰ Certainly, Baraka’s public persona was akin to Malcolm’s. As mentioned above, Baraka credits Malcolm’s vision and death as being central to the organizing efforts that gave rise to the Black Arts Movement. But further, there were other distinct connections between Baraka and Malcolm. Not only did the two men go through name changes and adopt black militant views, but both Malcolm X and Amiri Baraka were charismatic speakers who stood as highly visible spokespersons for black nationalism and black arts, respectively. Given how he was represented on the covers of African American literary magazines, how fellow black writers respected him, and how he positioned himself against a white establishment, Amiri Baraka became, metaphorically speaking, a kind of Malcolm X among poets.

Novelist Charles Johnson, for instance, explains, “One of the most powerful literary voices that reached our constantly ringing ears [during the 1960s–70s] was Amiri Baraka’s.”²¹ Johnson observes, “I must admit

that no other speaker moved me quite so thoroughly. Flanked by guards wearing dashikis (this in 1969), Baraka read poetry . . . [and] carried away the breath of the young, impressionable audience with him” (23–24). Few American poets produced the kind of work that would require their having bodyguards during readings. That Baraka was flanked by guards during his readings projected the Malcolm-like image of a black speaker requiring a small security detail for his radical views.

In his poem “It Was a Funky Deal,” Etheridge Knight further advances the mystique of Baraka and his links to Malcolm. Referring to the slain leader in his poem, Knight writes, “You reached the wild guys / Like me. You and Bird [saxophonist Charlie Parker]. (And that / Lil LeRoi cat.)”²² So at the end of his Malcolm poem, Knight acknowledges Parker and Baraka as major influences, placing Baraka once again in esteemed company. Now, I do not want to overestimate the centrality of Malcolm X’s influence alone on black cultural workers of the era. Indeed, the climate of the 1960s and early 1970s was such that a number of models existed for aspiring black radicals. Still, the figure of Malcolm X appears to be an indelible mark on the black arts personage of Amiri Baraka. The idea of Malcolm certainly emerged regularly in Baraka’s poems.

In “A Poem for Black Hearts,” first published in *Negro Digest* in 1965, Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) memorializes the slain leader in the poem by relying on a rhythmic pattern: “For Malcolm’s eyes,” “For Malcolm’s words,” “For Malcolm’s hands,” “For Malcolm’s heart,” and later “For Malcolm’s pleas for your dignity, black men.” The repetitive phrasing gives the poem a chantlike mood, which allows the piece to function as a funeral song for Malcolm. The opening lines, “For Malcolm’s eyes, when they broke / the face of some dumb white man,” set a combative tone toward whites that characterizes much of the militant black poetry of the era. Toward the end of the poem, Baraka writes, “For Great Malcolm a prince of the earth, let nothing in us rest / until we avenge ourselves for his death . . . let us never breathe a pure breath if / we fail.”²³ Here, as he directly addresses a black audience, Baraka memorializes Malcolm and at the same time makes a call to other “black hearts” to commit themselves to radical action.

The focus on self-determination in many of Baraka’s poems corresponds to the nationalist ideology and militancy expressed by Malcolm X. That Baraka’s “Black Art” was initially directed to an audience in Harlem in 1965 is especially notable given Malcolm’s connections to Harlem. The anger and intensity of Baraka’s poem seem to figuratively and literally *stand in* where the slain political leader had left off. The

black nationalist aesthetics and by-any-means-necessary approach of “It’s Nation Time,” “Black People!,” “Black Art,” and several other poems by Baraka all demonstrate varying degrees of the nationalist philosophy popularized by Malcolm. As a result, Baraka’s poems re-present traces of the slain leader’s ideology and intensify the poet’s Malcolm-esque aura.

Like Baraka, Sonia Sanchez sought to infuse her writing with a Malcolm aura as well. In an interview with Houston Baker, Sanchez explains, “Our poems were almost direct results of how (Malcolm) presented things . . . always a strong line at the end—the kick at the end that people would repeat, repeat, and repeat, always a finely tuned phrase or line that people could remember.”²⁴ Here Sanchez identifies a technique of Malcolm’s speeches adopted by poets seeking to sound like the fiery and eloquent speaker. For Sanchez, “the kick” refers to a short, witty, and forceful statement regarding black liberation or nationalist concerns. Sanchez was widely known for producing poems that had “the kick” in them. In her poem “blk/rhetoric,” she writes, “who’s gonna make all / that beautiful blk/rhetoric / mean something.” Structurally, starting with a short question allows her to engage her audience immediately in the poem. In addition, Sanchez’s question functions to get her audience thinking about “what next?” or future actions. Thus, like Malcolm’s speeches, Sanchez’s poem relies on the distinct delivery style of employing nationalist content and directly addressing the audience in order to develop meaning. In short, she provides a “kick” that people could “repeat, repeat, and repeat.”

During the 1960s, Sanchez established herself as an eloquent speaker, and her nationalist poems often rely on repetition and quick, forceful questions in order to achieve effects. In her poem “Malcolm,” Sanchez attempts to become a voice of or for the leader as she writes that Malcolm “said, ‘Fuck you white / man. we have been / curled too long. nothing / is sacred now.’”²⁵ Since Malcolm X was known to avoid using profanity, it becomes clear that Sanchez is using “poetic license” in order to put words in the mouth of the slain leader. Sanchez’s critique of whites and encouragement of African Americans carried more credibility as she drew on the Malcolm brand. In addition, her use of derogatory words accentuates the idea that Malcolm responded defiantly to white adversaries.

Like Sanchez and Baraka, Madhubuti too aligned himself with the figure and sensibilities of Malcolm. Madhubuti dedicated his volume of poetry *Black Pride* (1968) to “brothers” Malcolm X, Langston Hughes,

and John Coltrane, who were “All innovators in their own way.” He expresses a connection to creative figures and a prominent political figure. The titles of Madhubuti’s first three volumes of poetry, for instance—*Think Black!* (1966), *Black Pride* (1968), and *Don’t Cry, Scream* (1969)—are parallel to the nationalist worldview expressed by Malcolm X and Black Power proponents. And like those militant figures, Madhubuti often utilizes streetwise language in order to appeal to his audiences and deliver provocative messages.

In his poem “But He was Cool or: he even stopped for green lights,” Madhubuti satirizes a “cool-cool ultracool” black man who is out of touch with the heated political realities of most African Americans. In “a poem to complement other poems,” Madhubuti humorously observes that a black man “standing on the corner, thought him was / cool. him still / standing there. it’s winter time, him cool.” While his critiques of coolness share qualities with Gwendolyn Brooks’s poem “We Real Cool,” Madhubuti’s sentiments also invoke memories of points made by Malcolm X about some groups of black people being out of touch with the circumstances of African Americans.

Humor and delivery style distinguish Malcolm’s critiques. In one speech, as he critiqued tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm said, “That’s your problem: you do too much singing. You need to stop singing and start swinging.” At another point, Malcolm recalled a magazine article he read while in prison; he interrupted or improvised his own narrative and said, “And don’t look surprised when I say I was in prison, you still in prison. That’s what America means: prison.” The strategic pauses and improvisations, voice inflections, signifying, and rhythms in Malcolm X’s speeches, as well as the humorous and direct appeals to African American audiences, are elements of a long tradition of black sermonizing and verbal play.

In addition, Malcolm often expressed ideas about the need for black transformation and self-determination, as he noted in his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech: “We have to change our own mind. . . . We’ve got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes.”²⁶ Similar to Malcolm, Madhubuti made transformation a recurring theme in his poems “a poem to complement other poems,” “But He Was Cool,” and “Change.” Overall, the connections between Malcolm’s ideology and the poetics of Baraka, Sanchez, and Madhubuti link all of these figures to the larger nationalist ethos central to black poetry during the era. Sanchez, Baraka, and Madhubuti, of course, were only three among a larger chorus of writers who gained a broader read-

ership by paying homage to Malcolm. Given the respect audiences had for Malcolm, poets who chose to transmute his ideology and delivery style to their poetry had much to gain in regards to a tried and proven approach for appealing to African American audiences and projecting distinct black radical principles.

The affirmations of Malcolm were not without limitations. In the process of celebrating Malcolm, poets and commentators often present narrow definitions of black masculinity. Recall, for instance, Ossie Davis's remarks: "Malcolm was our manhood, our living, black manhood! This was his meaning to his people."²⁷ Several poets—male and female—viewed Malcolm's confrontational rhetoric and militant persona as the ideal conception of manhood and rarely advocated for more diverse representations of the slain leader and black men in general. Thus, even as writers and audiences concentrated on achieving black self-determination and higher degrees of liberation, they often left limited definitions of black manhood underexplored. As literary critic Phillip Harper observes, uncritical celebrations of black manhood encourage "the unexamined acceptance and promulgation of conventional masculinity's most deeply problematic features, in the name of racial progress."²⁸ Of course, the motive to celebrate and elevate black leaders and make them compatible with the interests of large audiences requires simplification. By and large, poets were more concerned with constructing popular views of Malcolm as opposed to decidedly diverse and complex interpretations.

Just as some of the poems fell into limited and predictable patterns while celebrating Malcolm, some offered new possibilities. In particular, one of the most provocative poems on the slain Muslim leader was Welton Smith's "malcolm." The shifting modes, forceful tone, and length of Smith's poem make the piece especially notable. The poem initially appeared in *Black Fire* (1968), and sections of the poem were reprinted in Dudley Randall's *The Black Poets* (1971) and Arnold Adoff's *Poetry of Black America* (1973). Smith's poem contains six sections: "malcolm," "the Nigga Section," "interlude," "Special Section for the Niggas on the Lower Eastside or: Invert the Divisor or Multiply," another "interlude," and "The Beast Section." The narrator shifts the presumed audience based on the varied segments of the poem. In the first section, the speaker appears to communicate directly with Malcolm, lamenting the leader's death and routinely informing Malcolm that "you knew" or prophetically understood the signs being given during various stages of the minister's life.

The tone is serene, befitting a mourning individual who communes with a lost loved one. Conversely, “The Nigga Section” expresses strong rage directed at those African Americans who actually killed Malcolm: “slimy obscene creatures. insane / creations of a beast. / you have murdered a man. you / have devoured me.”²⁹ The term *beast* refers to white people and reveals that even as the speaker criticizes the black assassins, he links their origins to Caucasians. Still, the brunt of the condemnation remains on the African American killers as the tone of the section becomes angrier: “you rotten motherfuckin bastards / murder yourselves again and again / and call it life” and “spread your gigantic ass from / one end of america to the other / and peeped from under your legs / and grinned a gigantic white grin / and called all the beasts / to fuck you hard in the ass / you have fucked your fat black mothers / you have murdered malcolm” (286). The speaker draws on the tradition of the dozens and street language to articulate a strong sense of anger and frenzy toward Malcolm’s assassins. The section concludes with the message to the murderers that “I hope you are smothered / in the fall of a huge yellow moon.” These lines are notably poetic, in a formal sense, as opposed to the raw tone and obscene wording presented in the rest of the section, and offer slight closure and a calming transition to the next section.

The first “interlude” is markedly tranquil in comparison to “The Nigga Section.” In this section, the speaker expresses his regrets directly to his “Friend,” presumably Malcolm, that they never spent more quality time together. “Friend / we never danced together as men / in a public park Friend we never / spent long mornings fishing or laughed / laughed falling all down in the dirt holding / our stomachs laughing” (287). The peaceful and remorseful mood of this section illustrates an individual voicing regrets about failing to develop a closer companionship with a friend. The next segment, “Special Section for the Niggas on the Lower Eastside,” directs attention to bourgeois African Americans who “are deranged imitators / of white boys acting out a / fucked-up notion of the mystique / of black suffering.” Unlike the “uptown” African Americans who “believe they are niggas,” the ostensibly uppity African Americans have “jive-ass explanation[s] / for being niggas.” The speaker criticizes these bourgeois African Americans as “slobbering punks lapping in the / ass of a beast,” “frauds,” and “jive revolutionaries / who will never tear this house down / you are too terrified of cold / too lazy too build another house.”

As in “The Nigga Section,” the speaker harshly criticizes African

Americans for their embrace of white culture, presumably an act that makes them complicit in their own demise. Near the close of the section, the speaker rhythmically condemns the “jive mercenary frauds” for

selling nappy hair for a party invitation
selling black for a part in a play
selling black for a ride in a rolls
selling black for a quick fuck
selling black for two lines on page 6,000 in the new york
times
selling babies in Birmingham for a smile in the den

These biting accusations are framed within a cadence, providing the harsh statements with a visible musicality or streetwise verbal play. The repeated focus on “selling black,” of course, suggests a link to the historic exchange of African Americans during slavery. The section closes with a command to the bourgeois African Americans to “turn white you jive motherfucker and ram the bomb up your ass” (289). Returning again to the image of violence and sodomy, as in “The Nigga Section,” the speaker recommends a self-inflicted assault using a nuclear bomb.

The next “interlude” section is dominated by a series of “screams,” or recurring bursts of piercing and sonic fury. The speaker

screams
screams
malcolm
does not hear my screams
screams
betty
does not hear my screams
screams scraping my eyes
screams from the guns. (289)

Throughout the section, the speaker screams and laments the culture of violence that permeates America and the world by alluding to Malcolm and others who have met tragic ends, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and John Kennedy. Apparently, the screams are everywhere: “screams in the laughter of children / screams in the black faces” and later “screams in my head screams / screams six feet death” (290). The intense and recurrent auditory image of screams raises the readers’ ears to the pained

and unsettling sound that emerges in such turbulent times. It is fitting perhaps that unlike the other sections, this “interlude” appears not to have a specific intended audience, since the sounds of the piercing screams can be heard and go unheard by anyone.

Finally, the closing segment, “The Beast Section,” directed at white America, is notably calm and seemingly indifferent. The speaker observes:

I don't think it important
 to say you murdered malcolm
 or that you didn't murder malcolm
 I find you vital and powerful
 I am aware that you use me
 but doesn't everyone
 I am comfortable in your house
 I am comfortable in your language
 I know your mind I have an interest
 in your security. (290)

The speaker's disinterested temperament is especially striking given his rage-filled invectives and persistent screams in the previous sections of the poem. But here, the speaker seems resigned or relaxed. The cool-toned acknowledgments that he is comfortable in a white space and language and that he knows the white mind allow him to move effortlessly while drawing little attention. The supposed audience of whites seems unacquainted with the depths of the speaker's rage as expressed in the preceding segments; that audience remains unaware of how threatening their humble servant is. The speaker only wants “to sit quietly / and read books and earn / my right to exist.” As a final gesture of his generosity, the speaker informs the audience that “i've made you a fantastic dish / you must try it, if not now / very soon.” Given the speaker's prior anger, one wonders if the food is actually poisoned.

The range of modalities from rage to coolness, the shifts in audience, the graphic language, and the piercing sonic images make Welton Smith's work one of the most dynamic Malcolm elegies and one of the most explosive, multivocal poems of the black arts era. Larry Neal and Stanley Crouch both liken the force of Welton Smith's “malcolm” to the more radical elements of free jazz. According to Neal, the scatological language of the poem represents a “burst of tension-releasing images. Heard aloud, this poem takes on the characteristics of a contemporary saxophone solo by a John Coltrane or an Albert Ayler.”³⁰ In a review of

the anthology *Black Fire*, Crouch devotes special attention to Smith's "malcolm." Crouch notes that the poem "rises to a level of RAGE" and draws on a long tradition of black verbal practices as Smith "takes the strongest rip-off language from the street, couples it with the dozens, turns it rhythmically so that it sails above mere conversation, orchestrates it melodically into a heavy, long, growling Blues strophe and sets the whole thing up with such dynamics that you are reminded of one of those fantastic solos Max Roach took in the fifties with Sonny Rollins."

Crouch notes that "emotionally, in terms of force, it's the closest thing to Coltrane's long CHASIN THE TRANE solo that I've ever read."³¹ More recently, in her book *Gender and the Poetics of Excess: Moments of Brocade*, Karen Ford provides an extensive analysis of Smith's "malcolm," explaining that the poem "fulfills the aspirations of Black Arts excesses and yet also registers deep ambivalence about that rhetorical strategy."³² In other words, the poem embodies features of militant black poetry and at the same time critiques or extends the discourse. Editor and literary critic Cary Nelson includes Smith's "malcolm" in his *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (2000), observing that the poem's "tonal shifts help make it one of the most memorable and one of the more inventive poems to come out of the Black Arts movement."³³ Even if Smith's poem is the most memorable, he was certainly writing out of a larger discourse, one voice among a large chorus paying tribute to the slain leader.

The chorus of poetic voices cemented a place for Malcolm in the literary history of black poetry. The slain leader was a ubiquitous subject of poems, but he was also presented as a model for how militant writers should display commitments to black communities. With their elegies for Malcolm, poets were mourning his absence, celebrating his life, and raising him as an exemplar for black radicalism. Making Malcolm central to their poems and public personas was more than simply a selfless act on the part of poets, however. Malcolm was a widely known and widely respected figure, and making him central to their works thus heightened the possibility that they might resonate with the more popular tenets of black arts discourse in particular and black nationalist discourse in general. While Malcolm was one of the most popular celebrated personages among poets, he was hardly the only subject of tribute. Poets focused on a wide range of African American artists and political figures in their writings. Still, Malcolm's assassination in 1965, as well as his black militant views, guaranteed that he would become a martyr figure and guiding inspiration for the writers' artistic enterprise.

The untimely death of Coltrane in 1967 determined that he too would become a revered and inspirational force in the writings of black poets.

Chasing Trane

In New York City on November 2, 1961, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones embarked on a daring sonic voyage. They chased a steaming, screaming locomotive into the outer reaches of the cosmos. With quick patience on bass and dynamic repercussions on drums, Garrison and Jones, respectively, followed saxophonist John Coltrane's lead as he raced along with wild and brilliant phrasings on a fifteen-minute-plus solo. "The melody not only wasn't written," said Coltrane, "but it wasn't even conceived before we played it. We set the tempo and in we went." The result of their collective composition was a song aptly entitled "Chasin' the Trane."³⁴ Jones and Garrison, of course, were only two among many creative artists to dramatically follow Coltrane.

Similar to Malcolm, Coltrane became a prominent, pervasive subject in black poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. Shortly after Trane's death in 1967, poets began to represent the musician as a revered creative figure and significant poetic muse. Many poets even promoted a saintly view of the late saxophonist. When the seemingly nonreligious narrator of Carolyn Rodgers's poem "Jesus Was Crucified" is asked if she prays, she responds, "sorta when I hear Coltrane."³⁵ Rodgers, like so many poets, would continually celebrate Trane as a tremendous guiding artistic force.

The timing of the musician's death was actually a crucial factor in why he became such an important figure of poetic exploration. Coltrane had died just as groups of writers were developing their movement and searching for ideal models. Trane had produced an incredible body of wide-ranging ideas—ideas that could and would be interpreted as distinctly black. As a recently deceased exemplar of artistic excellence, the saxophonist represented a common source of mourning and prideful reflection for black artists. Memorializing the loss and accomplishments of remarkable black figures was integral to the objectives of poets who wanted to channel and influence the larger, shared concerns of African Americans.

Altogether, the numerous elegies focusing on Coltrane enabled poets to celebrate his achievements and decode the racial implications of his life and music. Whereas Malcolm's words were available through his speeches and coauthored autobiography with Alex Haley, Coltrane pre-

sented a new and exciting challenge for poets interested in assessing his message. Trane's statements were primarily wordless; therefore, representing his ideas required poets to delve into the discourses of music in order to produce convincing poetic interpretations of what the saxophonist was sharing with his audiences. The process of elegizing Coltrane led poets to draw on the jazz lexicon and structural patterns and allude to musicians and songs, embedding their writings with what several scholars have referred to as a "jazz aesthetic."³⁶

According to William Harris, jazz aesthetics relate to issues of "transformation," as in "the conversion of white poetic and social ideas into black ones" and the conversion of musical ideas into literary ones. The display of jazz aesthetics is certainly not exclusive to African American literary art; however, it is important to note that the phrase "jazz aesthetics" has specific routes in black arts discourse, as the term "grows out of the way critics used *aesthetic* in the expression *Black Aesthetic*," explains Harris.³⁷ The appearance of jazz aesthetics in the writings of such leading poets as Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Larry Neal, Jayne Cortez, and Haki Madhubuti reveals the connections between the New Black Poetry and what was known as the New Black Music, or free jazz.

According to musicologist John Szwed, 1959 marked an important year in the emergence of this experimental movement in jazz, as three influential albums were released: John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*, Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*.³⁸ In 1960, Coleman's album *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation* included a double quartet and an innovative sound that gave even more shape to the developing movement among musicians. Free jazz, as the movement was called, was characterized by "modal playing" and unconventional approaches to tonality, melody, and rhythm, which gave the music unconstrained or *free* structures. The movement's leading figures, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane, ultimately inspired a break with standard forms in ways that corresponded well to the spirit of radicalism so prevalent during the 1960s. Certainly, advocates of black power and empowerment took notice. In *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (1970), Frank Kofsky explains that "the same milieu which gave rise to Malcolm had also generated the most vital forms of contemporaneous jazz."³⁹ Free jazz musicians did not gather the financial profits or popular followings of Motown artists and other major R&B singers, yet the experimental musicians, with their quest for something new, appealed to the sensibilities of New Black Poets.

Although free jazz began taking shape across the country, John Szwed explains, “it was on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that the music first found itself, among the new community of musicians who settled there in the early 1960s.”⁴⁰ Consequently, the music was being played in the places where Baraka, A.B. Spellman, Larry Neal, and other black arts poets gathered. At 27 Cooper Square in the Village, Baraka’s home was a gathering place for musicians and artists in 1964; saxophonist Archie Shepp also lived in the same building. Larry Neal explained that “there was this community of people circling around Archie and LeRoi, really getting various ideas about the role of art in the struggle.”⁴¹ The legendary Five Spot jazz club was nearby and allowed the writers to catch groups that included Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Cecil Taylor, and Ornette Coleman.⁴²

Coltrane was one of several musicians, including Sun Ra, Betty Carter, Albert Ayler, and Archie Shepp, who participated in a benefit concert for the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School in March of 1965. Baraka described Coltrane’s contributions and the larger implications of his music in the liner notes for *New Wave in Jazz*, the live recording of the benefit concert. “*TRANE* is now a scope of feeling,” wrote Baraka. “A more fixed traveler, whose wildest onslaughts are now gorgeous artifacts not even deaf people should miss.”⁴³ Coltrane’s performance at the black arts benefit signaled to the writers that the saxophonist was indeed sympathetic to their interests. Actually, since the concert was a black arts event, Trane could be viewed in some respects as a contributor to the movement.

Trane was hardly known as a militant nationalist, at least not in any conventional sense, yet his music was regularly interpreted as displaying elements of radical consequence. “Jazz musicians like Coltrane,” observes William Harris, “have routinely revised popular white tunes into black compositions by criticizing popular white songs; their listeners can identify the original song but sense that it has been altered to fit a different perspective.”⁴⁴ Coltrane’s varied renditions of “My Favorite Things” stand as the most outstanding example in this regard; he constantly revised his performance of the song, infusing the stylistics of free jazz into the piece. Trane’s disruption of conventional forms was certainly appealing to a group of black artists who sought to rupture established Eurocentric forms. A brief examination of Coltrane poems by Michael Harper, Jayne Cortez, Sonia Sanchez, Askia Toure, A. B. Spellman, Keorapetse William Kgositsile, Haki Madhubuti, and Quincy Troupe reveals the ways that poets incorporated jazz aesthetics into

their works in their pursuit of Trane. Focusing on these kinds of poems illuminates a ubiquitous mode of African American verse, namely, celebrations of black music and elegies for musicians.

Michael Harper's poem "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" begins with the words "a love supreme, a love supreme," lines from Coltrane's well-known 1964 suite *A Love Supreme*. Readers familiar with the sound of Coltrane's famous phrasing can, presumably, *hear* Trane as they read Harper's poem. At different intervals throughout the poem, Harper interjects the phrase "a love supreme" as he briefly charts the life experiences of Coltrane. Harper starts with Coltrane's birth in Hamlet, North Carolina, notes his career as a musician, and closes the poem by mentioning the struggles that Coltrane had near the end of his life with a "diseased liver."⁴⁵ The poem is written as if Harper is communicating directly with Coltrane. As a result, Harper provides the audience with the opportunity to overhear a personal conversation between a poet and the musician, as he appears to commune directly with Coltrane. "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" raises the possibility that poets can converse with the dead. Whereas Harper is not typically considered a black arts poet, his poems on Trane and other jazz figures situate his work firmly within the discourse.

Jayne Cortez's "How Long Has Trane Been Gone" establishes a connection to the black community by addressing her audience directly. Cortez is also interested in an audience that may not have adequately appreciated the sacrifices made by black musicians. Cortez explains: "You takin—they givin / You livin—they / creating starving dying / trying to make a better tomorrow / Giving you & your children a history / But what do you care about / History—Black History / and John Coltrane." In the process of remembering Coltrane, Cortez encourages her audience to understand and appreciate their history—black history. By exhorting her audience to embrace consciousness and black culture, Cortez assumes the position of poet as political agitator, a familiar role among black creative artists.

At intervals in her poem, Cortez repeats the phrase "How long how long has that Trane been gone." Using this rhymed phrasing allows her to present a musicality in her poem, celebrate Trane, and at the same time voice her frustrations and regrets that "some / of you / have yet to hear him [Trane] play."⁴⁶ Cortez plays on the word "Trane" as she blends the idea that her audience has missed an automotive train with the notion that they did not fully grasp the importance of Coltrane. Cortez extends her remembrance of Trane and envisions a day when

African Americans will inhabit places such as Charlie Parker City, Billie Holiday Street, James Brown Park, and “The State of Malcolm X” (16). Apparently, Cortez’s play on Trane and trains led her from memories of disappointment to prophecies of worlds where black people will have greater degrees of self-determination.

Poets often went a step further in paying tribute to Coltrane and suggested that the musician inspired African American audiences to positive, if not revolutionary, action. Toward the end of Sonia Sanchez’s “a/coltrane/poem,” she explains, “yeh. john coltrane. / my favorite things is u. shown us life. / liven. / a love supreme. / for each / other / if we just / lissssssSSSTEN.”⁴⁷ Sanchez interprets Coltrane’s music as providing messages to African Americans about the necessary steps for living more fulfilling lives. Like Sanchez, several poets project the view of Coltrane as a kind of spiritual being and guide. In his poem “Juju,” Askia Toure refers to Coltrane as “a Black Priest-prophet” and closes noting that the saxophonist is “Not gone, for I can see, can hear him still: my Heart / my Soul my All vibrating—Trane!”⁴⁸ In the closing lines of his poem “Did John Coltrane’s Music Kill Him,” poet and music critic A .B. Spellman writes, “o john death will / not contain you death / will not contain you.”⁴⁹ Similarly, in his poem “Acknowledgment,” taken from a title section of Coltrane’s album *Love Supreme*, Keorapetse William Kgositsile writes, “John Coltrane, they say / he died, the hasty fools,” and he concludes, “how could he die / if you have ears!”⁵⁰ As these poems suggest, in the process of situating Coltrane within the contexts of their works, poets pinpointed the ability of the musician to transcend death and thus influence the living, “if we just lissssssSSSTEN.”

Listening closely to Coltrane led several poets to follow the musician’s lead and experiment with sound, most notably by utilizing screams and wordless phrasings. A major technique utilized by Coltrane and other free jazz saxophonists was the application of a shrilling and forceful projection from their instruments during their solos. In short, it sounded as if the musicians were making their horns scream and wail. Trane’s scream, as well as the saxophone screaming of musicians Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, and John Gilmore of Sun Ra’s group, was a hallmark of the New Black Music. “If you even put a toe into mid-60’s Coltrane,” writes Ben Ratliff in the *New York Times*, “you have to come to grips with the scream.”⁵¹ A number of poems focusing on Coltrane emulate the actual sound of the saxophonist made in his songs. Haki Madhubuti and Baraka, to name only two, transmuted Trane’s signature

screaming techniques in dramatic fashion on the page. The poets interpreted Trane's scream as a radical call to action and a disruption of the seemingly typical Eurocentric serenity of art. The process of emulating Trane's scream gave poets reason to alter the way words were presented on the page, not to mention how they were presented out loud.

In his poem "Don't Cry, Scream," Madhubuti speaks of Trane as an inspiration and seeks to represent the "SCREAMMMM" of the saxophonist in his poem. Rather than weep about the pain of loss, Madhubuti writes, "I didn't cry / I just / Scream-eeeeeeeeeeeeee-ed / SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-ED."⁵² In order to provide a more faithful rendering of the sounds that Coltrane made, Madhubuti adds multiple e's to the words "scream" and "screch." He also capitalizes words to represent an increased volume. The "SCREAMMMM" of Madhubuti's poem correlates to the "sCReeEEECHHHHHH" that Sanchez presents throughout her "a/coltrane/poem" and reveals that for Madhubuti and Sanchez emulating Trane meant disrupting conventional forms of typography. Presenting elements of free jazz in their poems meant that they would alter, in spectacular fashion, approaches to writing words. Further, by representing jazz in their work, they assumed the role of poet-performers.

In the field of Coltrane poems, Quincy Troupe's poem "Ode to John Coltrane" constitutes one of the most vivid examples of a poet using the musician as a point of reference for drawing connections between varied elements of African American cultural history. Thematically, Troupe's tribute to Trane covers black musical, literary, and speculative histories and African American spiritual or sacred traditions. Troupe begins the poem by noting that "With soaring fingers of flame / you descended from Black Olympus / too blow about truth and pain; yeah, / just to tell a story about Black existence." He writes that Trane was "Hurling thru spacelanes of jazz / a Black Phoenix of Third World redemption," and later in the poem, Troupe refers to the musician as "John the Baptist."⁵³ First, by speaking of Trane descending from Black Olympus, Troupe invokes the saxophonist as emerging from mythic African American origins. Thus, Troupe's poem memorializes Trane, but the poem also suggests that Trane is part of a black mythology. Referring to Coltrane as "a Black Phoenix" who traveled through "spacelanes," Troupe associates the musician with African American science fiction or a black sense of speculative cosmology. In Troupe's poem, Trane is supernatural. At the same time, labeling him John the Baptist allows Troupe to situate the musician in biblical history.

As a result, then, Troupe presents a mythical, cosmic, and religious idea of Coltrane. The exaggerations used to describe Trane do not weaken Troupe's credibility as a narrator so much as reveal his poetic skills and creativity in honoring the musician.

Over the course of the poem, Troupe charts black musical history by mentioning several songs Coltrane composed or songs that the saxophonist appeared on, including "Kulu Se Mama," "Ole," "Ascension," "A Love Supreme," "Kind of Blue," "Round Midnight," and "Equinox." Also, he mentions other musicians whom Trane was influenced by or played with, such as Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Eric Dolphy. The appearance of the songs and musicians in the poem solidifies the speaker's authority as a jazz poet. In addition to providing musical history, Troupe constructs a narrative that highlights Coltrane's centrality to African American social histories. According to Troupe, "Those who were familiar with your [Trane's] agony. / Those who were familiar with your pain" would relate (234). In addition, those who "chased america's illusions" and who were "garbed in the evil mantle of white doom" would feel a connection with the overall expressions and implications of Coltrane's work.⁵⁴ Ultimately, Troupe's poem suggests that Coltrane's music serves as the soundtrack for the larger experience of a group of people seeking to achieve self-determination and confront antiblack racism in America.

From a technical standpoint, "Ode to John Coltrane" reads like a prayer, as Troupe employs African American stylistics in order to convey his ideas. For one, the recurring use of "you" to refer to Coltrane allows Troupe to imply that he is communicating directly to the deceased musician. As was the case with Harper's "Dear John, Dear Coltrane," the larger effect is that readers are actually overhearing Troupe talking to the seemingly supreme being Coltrane in the poem. Applying exclamation marks to emphasize certain words such as "style," "James Brown," "Coltrane," and "you" in the poem, Troupe figuratively adjusts the volume and pitch of the poem on particular notes. In addition, he uses the word "yeah" throughout the poem as a way of instilling a conversational tone. At various points toward the beginning of the poem, Troupe utilizes a chanting style to describe Coltrane's achievements and actions. Troupe writes, "*Trane Trane runaway train smashing all known dimensions / Trane Trane runaway train smashing all known dimensions*" (230). That he italicizes the words suggests that they are sung or spoken differently than the nonitalicized words.

Similar to Cortez's poem on Coltrane, Troupe's sentences play on

the idea of Trane and a train, giving readers the image of Coltrane as a locomotive. Moreover, as Shirley Anne Williams explains, the word “train” is a “mascon” in African American discourse communities. Mentioning a train carried importance on multiple levels, especially since locomotives represented literal and figurative historical significance for black people because of the Underground Railroad, south-north African American migrations, and religious and secular music relying on “Gospel Trains” and “Soul Trains.” Therefore, as Williams observes, “It is the stored energy of this mascon which enables Afro-American poets to play so lovingly and meaningful with John Coltrane’s name and they capture something of his function as an artist in their use of his nickname, Trane.”⁵⁵ Troupe’s play on “Trane” and “train” connects him to a larger network of interrelated black verbal practices that draw on the significance of locomotives as vessels of freedom. Much like the music of the saxophonist whom the poem seeks to memorialize, Troupe’s “Ode to Coltrane” reflects multiple African American thematic and technical modalities in dramatic fashion.

Taken together, the multiple appearances of Malcolm and Coltrane poems is indicative of the larger practice among editors of publishing verse on African American historical figures and musicians. Collections such as *Black Fire*, *For Malcolm*, *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, and *The Black Poets* and magazines such as *Liberator*, *Negro Digest/Black World*, and the *Journal of Black Poetry* featured poems that celebrated the revolutionary potential of music and presented past and modern African American leaders and activists as models for how to achieve liberation. The recurrent publication of tributes and elegies solidified the place of these kinds of poems in the canon of African American poetry. This recurrent publication was mediated, as always, by anthologists and magazine editors. The widespread publication of tributes and elegies should be viewed as an active collaboration between poets and editors. The editors ensured that these particular types of poems would have wide circulation. These processes of socialization were integral to the formation of black arts discourse, as well as how African American poetry was viewed then and now.

Amiri Baraka’s “A Poem for Black Hearts,” for instance, appeared in several anthologies, including *For Malcolm*, *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, *Dark Symphony*, and *The Black Poets*, making this elegy for Malcolm one of Baraka’s most anthologized pieces. Anthologists also seemed to favor Malcolm poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Etheridge Knight, Larry Neal, and Margaret Walker, reprinting their tributes to the leader in sev-

eral collections as well. Similarly, poems focusing on Coltrane and various other musicians seemed to be regular fixtures in publications featuring African American poetry. The receptiveness of anthologists and magazine editors to verse displaying jazz aesthetics seemed to guarantee publishing venues for poets who highlighted black musicians in their works. In the process, editors determined that poems paying tribute to the radical impulses of black music and the militant spirit of black historical figures would become central features of the discourse.