The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry

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Introduction

1. Larry Neal, “Cultural Front,” 27.
4. McGann, *Textual Condition*, 15, 13. Over the past few decades, several literary texts by black authors have been “rediscovered” or unexpurgated, including books by Hannah Crafts, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright, to name a few. Also over the last decade, the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers has released several books by authors such as Phillis Wheatley, Pauline Hopkins, and Harriet Jacobs. Despite all of this activity on the level of technical production, at present there remains a paucity of criticism on the editorial practices and policies that inform the presentation and reprinting of black books.
16. Malcolm X was not the sole author of the document, but it is often attributed to him because of his leadership role with the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Malcolm X, “Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives,” 557, 563.
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Chapter 1

2. Gerald, Untitled, 29.
7. I am not suggesting that journals such as Liberator and the Journal of Black Poetry were insignificant. Indeed, several journals made important contributions to the presentation of the New Black Poetry. However, none had the reach and resources of Negro Digest/Black World. Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson, Propaganda and Aesthetics, 187.
8. Semmes, Roots of Afrocentric Thought, xi.
10. Semmes, Roots of Afrocentric Thought, xi.
12. For an index of poems, poets, articles, and reviews published in Negro Digest/Black World, see Semmes, Roots of Afrocentric Thought.
17. Evans, “A good assassination should be quiet,” 24.
18. Forms of literary criticism that focus on the words of poems and ignore the surrounding visual representations perhaps underestimate the effect that images have on readers. Scanning through dozens of black arts publications has made me aware, however, that in addition to offering sites for the publication of literary works of art, the Black Arts Movement also gave rise to the presentation of a multitude of visual texts.
19. Hoyt Fuller, interoffice communication (letter) to Mr. J. H. Johnson, Oct. 1, 1970, Hoyt W. Fuller Collection, Archives Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center.
20. Johnson returned Fuller’s letter regarding the two issues with a line drawn from Fuller’s request for the increase to the top of the letter with an “ok” and his signature.
22. “Down deep, we should know,” back cover.
25. Fuller, “Editor’s Notes,” 4.
28. Virginia C. Fowler, Nikki Giovanni, 47.
29. Giovanni, quoted in Virginia C. Fowler, Nikki Giovanni, 47.
31. Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God, 219.
35. Evans, “A good assassination should be quiet,” 24; Gilbert, “Mirrors,” 37.
36. I am indebted to Paul Youngquist for talking through this particular phrasing with me.
43. Haki Madhubuti (Don Lee), Negro Digest (January 1968): 44.
47. Raphael, “Roi,” 84.
52. “OBAC—A Year Later,” 94.
55. Reed, “You Can’t Be A Literary Magazine and Hate Writers,” 20.
57. The exact reason for Johnson’s ending of the publication of Black World remains sketchy. Some suggest that the magazine’s pro-Palestine sentiments angered some of Johnson’s white advertisers for Ebony. On the other hand, the publication was not financially profitable, and thus Johnson may have finally considered the publication too much of a financial liability. See Hall, “On Sale at Your Favorite Newsstand,” 188–206.
58. Kalamu ya Salaam explains that in addition to the demise of Black World, the disruption of the Black Power movement and the commercialization and co-optation of black culture during the mid-1970s were among other factors that con-

59. For a complete list of the editorial advisors, see First World 1, no. 1 (1977):

60. Smethurst, “‘Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner,’” 261.
66. Larry Neal, “Cultural Front,” 27.
68. Fuller, “Negro Writer in the U.S. Assembly at Asilomar,” 43.
70. Amiri Baraka, “Toward the Creation of Political Institutions,” 54.
75. For more on the ways that feminism poses threats to black nationalism, see Hill-Collins Fighting Words.

Chapter 2

1. Randall, Black Poetry, back cover.
2. Randall, Black Poets, xxiii.
11. Redmond, Drumvoices, 354.
15. The Civil Rights Movement and the media attention it received helped create a strong interest in African American issues nationally and internationally and thus made it financially profitable for mainstream white publishers to add black-au-
thored books to their lists. As Hettie Jones, Amiri Baraka’s former wife, pointed out, “Negroes were now newsworthy. A trend had been spotted. Book sales could be predicted.” Hettie Jones, How I Became Hettie Jones, 147.


17. Barksdale and Kinnamon, Black Writers of America, 809.


Chapter 3

1. Although Toni Morrison is more widely known as a novelist, she was also an editor at Random House and assisted in the publication of writers such as Gayl Jones and Toni Cade Bambara. She also played a role in the publication of Henry Dumas’s posthumously published poetry. Morrison, “Behind the Making of the Black Book,” 90.

2. Giovanni, ego-tripping, 6–7 (subsequently cited in the text).

3. Amiri Baraka and Fundi, In Our Terribleness, 24.


6. Nielsen, Black Chant, 220.


8. Murray, Sonny’s Time Now.


13. Boyd, Wrestling with the Muse, 172–85. Boyd also writes that “between 1966 and 1975, Dudley Randall’s Broadside Press published eighty-one books, seventy-four of which were poetry, including single collections by forty poets, and of those forty, fifteen authored two or even three titles. . . . Under the auspices of Dudley Randall, Broadside Press published eighty-six books by more than two hundred poets.” Wrestling with the Muse, 3–4.


18. Don Lee, introduction to Sanchez, Homecoming, 6 (subsequently cited in the text).


Chapter 4

5. Fabio, “Tribute to Duke,” 245 (in *Understanding*).
19. For an engaging and extended discussion of black aesthetics, as well as Ralph Ellison’s tendency to keep “checking out style,” see Larry Neal, “Ellison’s Zoot Suit,” 31–52.
34. Liner notes to Coltrane’s *Live at the Village Vanguard*.
36. Several critics have discussed jazz aesthetics represented in poetry. See, e.g., William J. Harris, *Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka*; Feinstein, *Jazz Poetry*. 
47. Sanchez, “a/coltrane/poem,” 278.
54. Troupe does not specify exactly what he means by phrases such as “america’s illusions.” However, I would argue that Troupe’s seemingly vague and subtle critique offers more room for readers to interpret how America has failed to live up to its purported principles from their own perspectives. Troupe, “Ode to John Coltrane,” 234.

Chapter 5

2. Gates notes at one point, for instance, that Baker’s appear to be “rather oversimplified, basically political criteria, which are difficult to verify.” Gates observes that Gayle’s criticism displays “an alarming disrespect for the diversity of the black experience itself and for the subtleties of close textual criticism.” Gates, *Figures in Black*, 35–39.

14. The favorable comment on Rodgers’s essay that Darwin Turner made was initially published in Black World magazine in July 1970. I cite from the version of the article published in Addison Gayle’s The Black Aesthetic. See p. 72.


16. Usually, Negro Digest/Black World printed bylines for authors at the end of their essays. For some reason, no information is provided on Rodgers at the end. The statement appeared as the opening byline and offered no information about what books she had published or her affiliations. See Rodgers, “Black Poetry—Where It’s At,” 7.


