

KID CREOLE AND HIS *BEAU-COCONAUTS*: LLOYD ADDISON'S ASTRO-BLACK INFINITIES

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ABSTRACT

This essay takes the example of Lloyd Addison's *Beau-Cocoa* as a case study in African American small press activism. Lloyd Addison, one of whose poems gave the name to the Umbra group of poets, began *Beau-Cocoa* with collaborator Justus Taylor in the late 1960s, and the journal continued through format and personnel changes through 1973. While the journal continued to include writings by others, by far the bulk of the work, encompassing poems, plays, and political and critical writings were contributed by Addison himself, who frequently created concrete and visual works for the publication. Across the several numbers of *Beau-Cocoa*, Addison published 600 pages, including over 130 of his poems. Sometimes signing himself "the Beau-Coconaut," Addison used this journal to create a community of readers at the farthest reaches of his black, theoretical poetics.

KEY WORDS: African American literature, poetry, Lloyd Addison, *Beau-Cocoa*, small press activism, Umbra group, Black Arts.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo se centra en la revista de Lloyd Addison, *Beau-Cocoa*, como un caso práctico del activismo de las pequeñas editoriales afroamericanas. Lloyd Addison, uno de cuyos poemas dio nombre al grupo de poetas Umbra, comenzó *Beau-Cocoa* con el colaborador Justus Taylor a finales de los años sesenta del siglo XX y la revista continuó tras diversos cambios de formato y plantilla hasta 1973. Al tiempo que la revista incluía colaboraciones externas, el gran grueso de lo publicado, abarcando poemas, teatro y obras críticas y políticas, era del propio Addison, quien a menudo escribía poesía concreta y visual para dicha publicación. Él fue el autor de unas 600 páginas, incluyendo más de 130 poemas, en los diversos números de *Beau-Cocoa*. A veces y bajo la firma de "the Beau-Coconaut", Addison utilizó la revista para formar una comunidad de lectores más allá de su poética negra y teórica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura afroamericana, poesía, Lloyd Addison, *Beau-Cocoa*, activismo de las pequeñas editoriales, grupo Umbra, artes afroamericanas.



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Lloyd Addison, 1957
("Blue in Redding" 23)

"Where Do Words Go From Here?" (Addison, "Paranoia" 75) That question, posed in prose by poet Lloyd Addison in the midst of an autobiographical self-critique, remains as obstinately polysemous (and as ultimately neglected) as his writings. We can read it as a question regarding the future of experimental writing in the wake of his own texts while at the same time reading it as musing over the potential fate of his published words. Elsewhere in the same work he asks an equally rhetorical question, "Where do (short) subjects go from here?" (98), summoning up thoughts of his own lyric verse, of cinema, and even of the subjectivity of small persons (he alludes to his own relatively short stature at several points in his autobiographical writings). By placing the word "short" within metacritical parentheses, Addison seems also to be raising a question about the future of the subject itself, the directionality of subjectivity. That, it has to be said, remains even now a subject that the discipline of literary criticism somehow does not expect to find raised by African American poets writing out of the heat of the Black Arts and Black Power movements, but such were the questions set before us by Lloyd Addison, writing from his subject position, writing himself as a black American subject, in Harlem in the late 1960s.

On the most immediate reading, we needn't read far to find where Addison's words were going at the time. In his editorial note at the opening of the Summer and Autumn 1969 issue of his journal, *Beau-Cocoa*, Addison reports having just received word that his work is to be published as a small volume in London publisher Paul Breman's landmark Heritage Series of African American poets, a project wonderfully documented by Lauri Ramey's recent volume *The Heritage Series of Black Poetry, 1962-1975: A Research Compendium*. Addison also notes that Russell Atkins, editor of the *Free Lance* journal and another wildly experimental African American poet, will have a volume in Breman's series as well. Paul Breman, among the first British editors to feature the works of the newer black American poets, additionally promoted Addison's work by including him in the anthology *You Better Believe It: Black Verse in English*. Rosey Pool, another early European champion of African American letters (and like Breman, Dutch by birth), had included Addison in her classic 1962 anthology *Beyond the Blues*, at which time Addison quipped: "My only question is: which side of the Blues is she going beyond?" (*The aura & the umbra* jacket copy). Scanning the emerging prospects of African American poets in the early 1970s, one might well have thought there would be no end to where Addison's words might conceivably go. Not only had he appeared in the first collection published by the important collective of African American poets known as The Society of Umbra, they derived their group's name from one of his poems. He was named poet in residence for the Harlem Afro Arts Summer Festival in 1967 and published work in the resulting anthology. These events along with Addison's



appearances in the Breman and Pool anthologies, might have seemed to betoken an emerging poetic career on the threshold of greater, or at least some, recognition.

It had certainly been long emerging. Addison had been seeking publication of his poems and several novels since the 1950s. He had submitted to such journals as *New Mexico Review* and *Black Mountain Review* without success. He had been rejected by the Yale Younger Poets competition. Throughout, he seemed to maintain a good sense of humor about these efforts at public circulation. In a letter to Rosey Pool responding to her request for a submission of his materials he wrote: “Recently snubbed by the Yale Series for 1960’s award, I have a few scratches, but I heal quickly” (Pool Papers, nd). In his autobiographical essays he remarked that “Refusing to be bitter about missing a boat that never sailed is not an index of unawareness of what a good idea it is to build ships, and of what a masterbuilder’s product is, and of the wonder of horizons that many may never know to miss (and few risk falling off the world to essay)” (“R.S.V.P.” 40). This comment eerily prefigures in one direction a later poem by another neglected African American experimentalist: Bob Kaufman’s “For All Those Ships That Never Sailed.” That a black poet setting out on a voyage of formal and philosophical exploration might well risk falling off the edge of the known literary world was something that Addison

was prepared to essay. By 1969, the edge of that world was in sight. "I have devoted much (which is never much) of my spare time," he writes, "to inking paper but of works in printer's ink (other than my own) I can scarcely at the moment exhibit a half dozen twenty-cents-a-piece pages" ("R.S.V.P. 39-40). In the end, those few anthology appearances and that one small book in the Heritage series were all of Addison that was to come before a public, at least as inked by presses other than his own. Fortunately for Addison, and for us, the Breman volumes and Pool's anthology gained an international audience and Addison's verse could be read, in libraries if nowhere else, around the world. In 1965 Addison had privately published a chapbook with the wonderfully punning title *Rhythmic Adventures beyond Jazz into Avowal Sound Streams*, but his primary, very nearly only mode of address to a larger public would prove to be the journal *Beau-Cocoa*, which first appeared in 1968 and ran to eight volumes in the five years of its publication history. At a time when serial composition in arts ranging from music to poetry was becoming an ever more prominent aesthetic mode, Addison literally serialized his literary life, placing nearly six hundred pages of his life's work simmering in, as he put it, his own ink.

Every small press magazine has its own origin myths and reasons for being, often intimately tied to an individual poet's efforts to find a way in the contemporary literary world. Robert Creeley used the occasion of his announced intention to publish a magazine (which magazine he never did publish) as a ground upon which to approach Charles Olson and commence a productive correspondence that would stretch across decades. Clarence Major commenced what he titled *Coercion Review of Contemporary Power in Literature* in 1958, working out of Chicago. He announced his fervent hope "to expand this mag into a large widely circulating mag eventually, without any changes in policy" (1). That the magazine was in need of expansion was clear from the sixteen page length of the first issue. Still, within those sixteen pages one encountered writings by Kenneth Patchen and Lawrence Ferlinghetti as well as work in translation from Valery and Eluard. That *Coercion Review* was essentially the project of its poet editor was made plain in that very first number, which was labeled "A Clarence Major Venture," as well as by the fact that the journal's mailing address followed Major's own peregrinations from Chicago to Omaha and beyond. Some journals, *Hambone* being perhaps the most obvious current example, begin as group projects but become essentially the project of one person. *Hambone* was, at its inception, the creation of university students, but poet Nathaniel Mackey carried the project out of its collegiate origins and developed it into one of our major organs of innovative writing.

The poets of what came to be termed "The New American Poetry" in the post World War II American literary universe recognized that their works were unlikely to meet with a warm reception in the established organs of the regnant New Criticism and set about creating their own venues for readings and publications. In subsequent years, the loose associations of poets who came to be known as "Language Poets" after the name of one of their early low tech journals, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews's *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, followed much the same course. This much has been widely discussed and mapped in the critical literature. Less well known is the story of African American avant gardes and their small presses. Around



the same time that Clarence Major was publishing *Coercion*, LeRoi Jones was publishing *Yugen*, with his wife, Hettie Jones, and *The Floating Bear* with poet Diane Di Prima. Neither of these was at the time thought of especially as a *black* publication, but each provided important publishing opportunities for African American artists such as Harold Carrington, Stephen Jonas, Allen Polite and others. When Baraka left Greenwich Village and moved into the Black Arts era he took this do-it-yourself political and publishing aesthetic with him. This was a time when new black poetry journals erupted nearly everywhere, and the Black Arts emphasis upon creating black-controlled cultural institutions eventuated in the appearance of *The Journal of Black Poetry*, *Soul Book*, Third World Press (still going strong more than four decades later) and a host of others. It was in the midst of this movement for racial self-determination and cultural revolution that the first issues of *Beau-Cocoa* appeared.

Beau-Cocoa was never a one man operation. From the beginning, Lloyd Addison was listed on the mast head as Editor and Publisher, and Justus Taylor was identified as Editor at Large. Richard Taylor was credited as Manager of Promotion and Distribution early on, followed by Martin Fisher. From the outset other writers were invited to contribute, and some who responded, such as Biafran poet Onwuchekwa Jemie, are still on the scene today. Jemie, for many years an actively publishing scholar in American universities (perhaps best known for a book on Langston Hughes and another on decolonizing African literatures), is now editor-in-chief of the Nigerian *Business Day*. Among the small number of *Beau-Cocoa*'s published contributors we can discern a diversity that some journals today have yet to match. The fourth issue of *Beau Cocoa* included poems by Linwood Smith. Smith was a graduate of Galludet University, America's foremost university dedicated to higher education for the deaf and hard of hearing. Galludet has always placed a premium on building cultural institutions, its internationally recognized theater program standing as perhaps the best known instance of that dedication. Especially relevant to discussion of *Beau Cocoa* is Galludet's leadership training program in theater arts for deaf and hard of hearing people of color. At the time of his publication in Addison's journal, Linwood Smith was teaching deaf students in North Carolina and had already published in such venues as *Negro Voices*. Today, even with the advent of disability studies, scant critical attention has been given to the poetry of deaf African Americans, yet another way in which *Beau Cocoa* might be seen to have been an *avant garde*.

Still, the preponderance of work published in *Beau-Cocoa* over its life-span came from its editor/publisher and Addison seems to have found in his journal a novel mode of serial publication suited to the wildly ambitious explorations of his far-ranging aesthetics and cultural politics. His works of the 1950s appeared in the journal's pages interspersed among Addison's more recent writings and the smattering of works by other writers. When issue number one made its debut in Autumn of 1968, its cover made a particularly honest publisher's appeal to potential subscribers. The magazine, which bore a cover price of seventy-five cents, found humor in the so often failed announcements of publication schedules in the small press world. "(Try) Quarterly," it advised, asking readers to give the new quarterly a try.





The publishers went on to advise “(if not, try) 3 annually.” Joking aside, even that proved a problem, as only four issues appeared in the first two years, but they grew in size and ambition. That first issue carried the usual announcement of the journal’s mission, but couched in the highly unusual diction of its chief writer:

B-C aspires to fill the hiatus of the homesick NO in the pantheon of beauti-force, with the (black, touch-light, blackbox Ahha, having-and-not-to-have, uptowndowntown brown) tobac-cocoa, coffee, honey, sugarcane, licorice, liver, prime soil, lamblack, silhouette and thousand faces of the body of YES. The B-C body-social will be paradise regained black beauti-force. The vital catalytic agent in the birth of the supersummerman, summerwoman, to Isis-cycle away old winterman yesterday & black dynamo naturalize and shabazz-zam open-osaseme the mystery of black esthetics and awaken the twilight goddess.

The outside cover promised “young black brown handgrown seedlings” and the editor’s mission statement surely followed through on that promise. Addison’s commitment to opposing YES to NO and to seeking what he termed, over the course of many years, “beauti-force” were of a piece with mid-sixties, hippy yea-saying, more than a bit reminiscent of the literary effusions of Jimi Hendrix. At the

same time, however, the mission statement takes on a number of crucial conflicts within the late-sixties community of black creators. Addison playfully addresses himself to the long history of color confusion and prejudice in America, already signaled in the journal's title. *Beau-Cocoa* says that black is beautiful in all its shadings. Further, Addison dissolves antagonisms between uptown (Harlem) and downtown (East Village) art scenes without in any way diluting his allegiance to an aesthetics growing out of the lives of black peoples. Clearly this is not the prescriptivism so often ascribed to Black Arts Movement poets, but neither is it in any way a wandering away from a fundamental belief in the powers of the imaginations of black peoples. Well before the concept of the social construction of race had gained a firm hold in the academic firmament, Addison presented his journal as an instrument for the coalescence of a racialized social body. It will be in the writing and reading of *Beau-Cocoa's* modes of black beauty that a social body will come into being. This is a blackness without essentialism growing out of the debates over black aesthetics in the America of 1965-1975 and out of Addison's prior experiences with the Society of Umbra.

The geographical designators of African American literary history have always been as problematic as any other. The term "Harlem Renaissance" has long encompassed artists from Virginia, Washington, D.C., Chicago and farther reaches. (Sterling Brown made this point often, sounding an intertextual echo of Addison's talk of ships that may never have sailed: Brown responded to people who asked if he'd missed the boat when it came to the Harlem Renaissance by insisting that he'd never even gone down to the dock [*After Winter*].) Not every member of the Harlem Writers Guild resides in Harlem. The Society of Umbra's workshop may have been loosely associated with New York's Lower East Side, but it attracted writers from uptown, including Lloyd Addison. The organization was effectively initiated by writers David Henderson, Calvin Hernton and Tom Dent. Dent had become acquainted with Raymond Patterson and Lloyd Addison at Harlem readings organized by Langston Hughes's secretary, Raoul Abdul, and those poets quickly joined with the downtown group. Umbra was unusual in having several couples in its membership, such as Calvin and Mildred Hernton and Lennox and Maryanne Raphael. The group was never exclusively African American; Art Berger was a participant in its programs. Neither did the group prescribe any narrow formal focus. It did, though, quickly become an early forum for the more experimental of black writers. Among its alumnae are such well-known figures as Ishmael Reed and Lorenzo Thomas. Some, such as Tom Feelings and Leroy McLucas, became better known for their work in the visual arts. Addison came to the group as an already formed writer who, while obviously well-and broadly read, sounded like none among his modernist, Beat or Black Mountain predecessors. Lorenzo Thomas, who has spoken of Addison as a "frighteningly intellectual" poet, wrote that "Addison's poems, though indebted to T.S. Eliot and Melvin B. Tolson, seemed to emerge from the black community without any foreign influences; his language and themes were those expected from a people who grew up reading the Bible" ("Shadow" 66). One hastens to add, however, that the Bible, in none of its translations, approaches the wild innovation of Addison's syntax and idiom. The spectrum of black thought



indicated by the title of Addison's "The Aura and the Umbra" found its incarnation in the poetic explorations of the literary workshop who took their name from it. In the same way that Addison's poem had served as catalyst for the aesthetics of the Society of Umbra, Umbra had served as a major catalyst in the emergence of the Black Arts Movement in the later nineteen-sixties. Writing out of the dark hot center of that moment, Addison's mission statement for *Beau-Cocoa* envisioned his new venture as a catalytic agent in the laboratory of the new black arts, as the charge that would enliven the social body of the new black.

Despite its far reaching influence, both as namesake and as instigation, Addison's poem "Umbra" only appears at its full length in his own journal, where he included it in the first number. His Heritage Series chapbook included a truncated version of the poem and later reprintings followed Paul Breman's lead, and the full text remained, as it were, a textual fugitive. In the pages of *Beau-Cocoa* Addison precedes his poem with a brief note. Starting out by acknowledging the difficulties awaiting authors of long or even medium length poems, the poet describes his poem as "flourishing in its wilderness of wordpower since 1961-62" ("Umbra" 28). In a rare instance, the poem's namesake journal and organization preceded the full poem into print, though, as Addison goes on to note, the poem had long enjoyed life as a repeated performance, one much appreciated by those so fortunate as to have been among its audiences.

That first issue of *Beau-Cocoa* bore the traces of the violent era into which it was born. Beginning on page five, readers encountered a sustained poetic meditation, experimental in form, on the season of assassinations that had just passed. The series begins with Addison's "After MLK: The Marksmen Marked Leftover Kill," a poem also selected for Addison's Heritage series volume. The theme is picked up again two pages later in a poem titled "The Kennedy-King Sting (Rays)," the parenthetical portion of the title completing a verbal leap that conjoins the vernacular expression for a con job (a "sting") with an oceanic metaphor and the name of King's assassin, James Earl Ray, who was captured and convicted of the crime. This is followed by a lament titled "Bobbie... Bobbie..." a poem that continues Addison's characteristic wordplay. The piece opens with Robert Kennedy "in the eye of death, / surprised by its pointblank bead" (9), then moves to a punning address to America's seemingly never-ending fascination with firearms and debates over the scope of Second Amendment's guarantee, in light of the necessity of a militia, of the people's right to keep and bear arms:

casuistry? no: principles; but whose? got to go?
well, lets see/saw down across, fill in proposition
for "proven by bullets": rights to arms—
and all debates in the chambers discharge
quite unfulfitting, & unfitting eleventh hour erasure:
in an agony of composure... (9)

Here legislative chambers and the chambers of a gun both discharge to ill effect. The right to bear arms intersects in a sort of ideological crossword puzzle



with the taking to arms of those seeking their rights. A proof by bullets proves that the principled are not bullet-proof.

The assassination sequence concludes with a longer poem titled simply “MLK.” This intense, lyric elegy makes use of a technique of Addison’s that was not visible in his Heritage chapbook, the placement of hand drawings and hand writing in his printed poems. “MLK” opens with handwritten notes surrounding its title, asking rhetorically: “*Were you at / Selma, / Montgomery, / Memphis...*” (11), followed by a passage that plays upon Biblical usage while seeming to comment on the processes of its own scripting:

*do you believe...
howsoever you write MLK looks like milk,
and, honey, he’s dead
and, brother, hoodwinked soul heaven you think of love,
seems nobody knows how to get abreast the march-on... (11)*

A second eruption of handwritten script comes on the poem’s second page when the poet speaks of “inflationary” shame and reproduces the word *shame* in large-font majuscules. Reflecting upon government’s efforts to use its funding powers to stave off more “long, hot summers” of the sort that so marked the decade of the sixties, Addison remarks the “Sunday funnypaper money / for an anti-poverty entertainment / to shadowbox the summerheat” (12), and foregrounds the “Bitterness of blacks against whites against black power / in lieu of powerlessness and borrowed hope” (13), predicating and predicting the dialectics of promise and backlash to come. Picking up on a theme from “Bobbie... Bobbie...,” the poet writes of “unbulletproof Blues burning Beale Street” (13), which street runs through the city in which King was slain in the midst of his work with the striking sanitation workers, Memphis. “To lift the white trash cans you need black powerful muscle dignity” (13), Addison observes sardonically, then, seizing upon a pun made available in King’s most famous speeches pointing to the difficulties Reverend King faced in those final confrontations, the poet writes:

*:::Free at trash rally: gift cabbage miscegenation uplift,
a king shell-shocked and shut-up,
heaped humpty-dumpty disharmoniously humdrum
in unceremonious sing-out martyrdom’s doom:
grayday motto of overcoming::: (13)*

Addison’s multiplying colons seem to me more than simply typographical markings setting off the stanzas through this section of the poem. The triplicate colons fore and aft the stanzas strike me as providing visual reminders of the functions of that punctuation mark: segmenting, introducing, setting in apposition and drawing readers to logical consequences. In the antepenultimate stanza of “MLK” Addison asks: “And now / the overoutlook of April ‘68: / how might his summers not look back lastly...” (17). The poem, in the poet’s turn of phrase “an epitaph of eloquence for the lost exemplar” (17), concludes with the inevitable recollection of



“a dreamer at the Lincoln Memorial” (17), concludes on the ground that was that summer to become the muddied campgrounds of the Poor People’s Campaign.

Addison’s sequence of meditations in a time of assassination is followed immediately by a sort of modest proposal from *Beau-Cocoa’s* editor at large, Justus Taylor, a proposal Taylor reports having sent to President Johnson, Governor Rockefeller, Governor Romney (father and forerunner as presidential candidate of erstwhile son, “Mitt”), New York’s moderate Republican mayor John Lindsay and Bayard Rustin, all of whom responded with form letters “advising him of the impracticality of any other form of response” (18). Taylor’s proposal is “That the Federal Government undertake a promotional effort of substantial proportions to reverse the existing image of Afro-Americans in the eyes of the white majority, and in the eyes of some Afro-Americans themselves” (18). One wonders what the initial recipients of Taylor’s proposal might have made of such a thing, but it is worth noting that Taylor harbored no utopian delusions about what he was proposing. It was not, in fact, aimed at moral suasion. “This country actually does not function on such bases,” argues Taylor (20), going on to clarify that what he has in mind is that “the methods should be the same as have been used to make Americans consume more material things that they don’t need than in any other country in the world” (20-21). Taylor is proposing that America turn its advertising genius to improving the Black image in the White (and Black) mind.

Addison inserts another of his hand-written notes at the outset of his report on the 1966 Afro Arts Cultural Conference which immediately follows Taylor’s “Proposal,” and we are again at once thrust into the poet’s linguistic imaginarium. Introducing his report, Addison scrawls a description of it as “*another prose posing all... the an... other prose...*” (22). The piece is, assuredly, another prose offering, but it is also, as Addison’s self-interruptive writing proclaims, an *other* prose: both prose of the other and prose like no other. The Afro Arts Conference had been held at the famous Teresa Hotel in Harlem. The tallest building in Harlem at the time, the Teresa had played host to everybody from Louis Armstrong to Jimi Hendrix. Its widest fame probably came from the coverage afforded the visit of Fidel Castro, who welcomed the delegation of Nikita Khrushchev at the hotel, but around the time of the Afro Arts meetings the hotel was probably better known among black cultural activists as the site for the meetings of Malcolm X’s (by then rechristened El-Haj Malik El-Shabazz) Organization of Afro-American Unity. Despite this powerful legacy, the hotel had already closed by the time Addison’s report of the conference appeared in the first issue of his journal. The report itself is a poetic distillation of the debates surrounding the Black Aesthetic Movement, and effectively argues that: “Black Power... follows from the reality of White Power (as an aspiration)... and would constitute the cultural maturation of black folk (operatively), the black community, etc.; in consequence of which growth it negates the racial significance (conflict) of White Power as well as any (conflict) in and of itself” (24).

While the greater part of *Beau-Cocoa’s* second issue is given over to Addison’s three act play *Mr. Black and Miss Integration*, The critical views expressed by Addison in that first issue find their strong echo in Justus Taylor’s review of the controversial “Harlem on My Mind” exhibition of New York’s Metropolitan Mu-





seum, a show that was already being protested before it opened and which was picketed by cultural activists. Responding to white critics of the show, many of whom argued there was no “art” in the exhibit heavily weighted towards photos and video, Taylor argued that:

The consensus of the unhappy white criticism of the HARLEM exhibit seems to be that it is gimmickry in its audio and visual effects... It seems patent that such commentary is dishonestly sterile in the context of the present anxiety about racial hostilities in New York City. (9)

Taylor also had a few words for the militants picketing outside the show, many of whom were outraged that a white man had been selected to curate the Met’s first ever show taking Harlem as its subject:

...if the exhibit truly depicted blacks through whites’ eyes we would have much less hostility and much less anxiety about it. If his eyes had ever revealed to him that we have a whole bag too, the sets would have been permanently unsettled long ago. (9)



Prefiguring notorious comments from Bill O'Reilly decades later, Taylor imagines white visitors to the exhibit of black life commenting, "I never knew they ate from tables" (9). What comes across most clearly from Taylor's review is a point of agreement between him and Addison regarding the very nature and structure of race. "The race in racism," Taylor writes, "is not a matter of color, but rather a matter of a bag of attitudes" (8).

As if to underscore this point about the shiftiness of race, the play by Addison that takes up most of this issue is accompanied by a repeating black and white illustration that calls to mind the figure/background shifting optical illusion in which we alternately see the outline of a lamp or of two faces. The black and white of the illustration cause a constant figure/background shift of racial definition as we read the play. (In passing, the journal's habit of signing pieces with the author's initials creates a journalistic pun as Taylor's initials, provided all in caps as "JET", would inevitably put contemporary readers in mind of *Jet* magazine, a sister publication to *Ebony* in the Johnson family of African American mass market magazines).

That Addison's conceptions of race link to his conception of the individual subject comes into view most forcefully in those autobiographical writings that appear in the journal under the title "R.S.V.P.," couched as always in Addison's verbal playfulness:

I was undressing one day considering that since I seemed committed to writing I should have something to write about, oh—like Yerby writes historical stuff, and Elison [sic] writes invisible stuff, and Wright writes Dostoyevskian stuff, and others wrote rote stuff—aha, I'll write black stuff, about the lost esthetic, black beauty. It came to me. (39)

But who is this "me" to whom it came? In the second paragraph of his autobiography, Addison declares: "There is in fact no I to put the finger on except the hands are of emotional time and replace some of the conglomerate gone thither, in which (emotional) physico-chemical transformations I regain the rib and the covenant" (39). Addison, who could never be accused of relying on the rote, was in pursuit of a dynamic black aesthetic and in his explorations we can see his engagements with critical positions more frequently associated in literary history with later moments of literary theory.

Addison is always beginning from a point asserting a Black power. Indeed, writing in a 1970 issue under the wildly punned title "Fanon Fodder," the poet argues that "the manifest destiny of the black is cultural decolonization" (102), putting himself in opposition to some he saw as "trying to make a NEGRO rather than a black literary establishment" ("R.S.V.P." 40). In this he clearly fits within what most literary historians have chosen to remember of the Black Arts Movement. What this meant in Addison's politico-aesthetic practice, though, serves as a powerful reminder that the breadth of critical thought during the era of the Black Arts could be far more encompassing than has been commonly thought. When contemplating what received wisdom has given us of the Black Arts, we'd do well to recall Addison's apothegm, "where prejudice poses, genius disposes" ("R.S.V.P." 42).



Addison did find himself jousting with a mode of poetic prescriptivism early on. “I’ve been told,” he reports, “...to avoid esoteria (verbiage of rhythm and ideas). But it seems no coincidence that most of the better music is notationally difficult. Are Jazz and Ragtime too elegant for the black spirit?” (“R.S.V.P.” 41). Addison will reject both the expectations of white readerships still looking for the two stops of bathos and pathos James Weldon Johnson had thought to leave behind at the opening of the Harlem Renaissance and the more limiting prescriptions of some among his black colleagues. He sees the struggle around writing in terms familiar from African American cultural history:

...our real job, ladies and gentlemen, is not to be literary Booker T. Washingtons, consigning blacks to literary (artistic) mentality (perhaps you’re telling the establishment that elegance is the last thing blacks WANT and telling blacks it’s the last thing they NEED accordingly) but to assist him in developing, creating, defining, delineating, etc. that which of his own encompasses the vast range of human spiritual aspirations. (“R.S.V.P.” 43)

Reading this it is difficult not to think of those passages where W.E.B. DuBois skewered Washington for his too ready relinquishing of black aspirations for learning and aesthetics. On the one side, Addison will not reconcile himself to a reductive cultural nationalism that would have the effect, in his view, of relegating blacks to “a rental-unit reservation of beads and dashikis” (“R.S.V.P.” 43; and note well how closely this position coincides with the later Marxist critique Amiri Baraka was to direct towards 1960s cultural nationalist perspectives). But on the other side, Addison had no patience whatsoever with the limiting expectations of the white critical establishment. “Don’t let anyone tell you, blackman,” he admonishes, “that elegance is no part of your style, or that literacy is not your thing” (“R.S.V.P.” 42). Addison cannot abide anyone telling a race of people who produced a Duke Ellington that elegance is not their possession; will not reconcile himself to a critical modality that denies complexity of invention to a people who gave the world jazz. Clearly the warnings he had received in the 1950s against the esoteric in poetic style still rankled; as clearly, he saw a racial agenda not so well concealed within those warnings.

By the late 1960s Addison was deploying a new term for what he hoped to accomplish in verse, an “Addisonism” as he termed it, *surromanticism*, which he describes as “an allowance for song—words, music... arrived at through accompanying efforts to reassess the African scene” (“Adolescent Romance” 77). Following in the path of the *negritude* poets, Addison was to break with the mainstream verse culture of his day, a verse culture which had never permitted full entry to black poets in the first place. Like Senghor and Césaire, he refused to be bound by the strictures of realism, seeking a *beyond* that took an African diasporic past as its point of departure. In some regards his poetics was on a track parallel to the aesthetics championed by modernist poets and their subsequent progeny. Unlike Russell Atkins, for example, Addison hewed to a principle of *condensare*, though the results in his case were far different from the work of an Oppen or a Creeley or a Niedecker. Writing in *Beau-Cocoa* in 1970, Addison commented that:

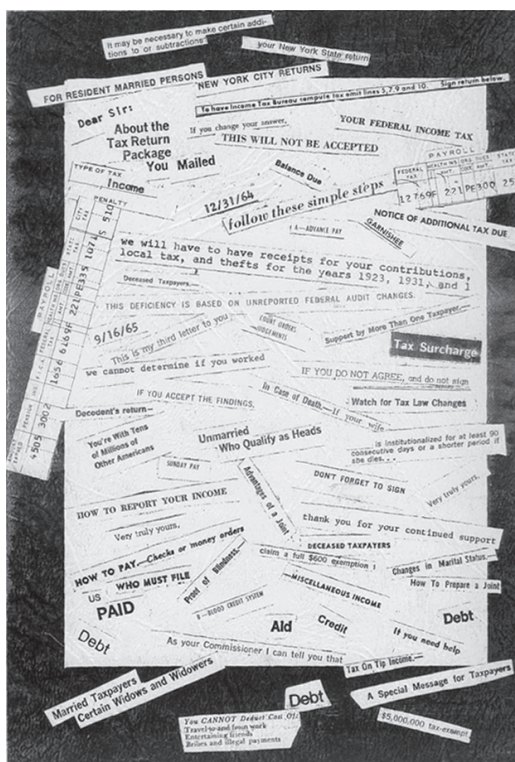


The condensation of IDEAS is one of the sweaty tasks in poetry wherein the attempt is to create new “words,” new ideas and the creation of a new world. This is not always the attempt, of course. More often, the poet is trying to present the view from other or several vantage points—a matter of dimension. On the other hand, the world changes drastically by dint of such ‘new dimensions.’ (“Adolescent Romance” 71)

The cubist modernism of *Tender Buttons* is one predecessor for what Addison was attempting, though shorn of the racism of Stein’s model. Closer to what Addison was after were the dimensions opened to Euro-American arts by the African art works that had done so much to inspire cubism in its inception, those statues that, in the words of Addison’s senior contemporary Melvin B. Tolson, “gave lyricism and / Space reality to modernistic art” (cont. 8). Addison’s way into the post-African modernist dimensions was by way of *condensare* applied at the semantic level. Thus, in addition to arguing for his Addisonism “surromanticism,” Addison propounded a black beyond of signifying, a “sursemantic. And here Addison comes into alliance with such a radical experimentalist as Atkins, a poet who rooted his verbal art in a revolutionary view of the visual. For Addison, the *sursemantic* was “intended to transcend visual primacy, yet sustaining romantic enchantment, & otherwise to appropriate the page (primarily visual media as such) in black and white to move BEYOND THE BLUES with a life-assertive music” (“The Off-Black Road” 62). There is much to remark in this passage. It is accompanied by yet more of Addison’s hand-writing, but also by a line drawing, seemingly illustrating the very appropriation of the page the poet writes of while at the same time moving the attention back to the writing as mark. The space of the page additionally appears to make manifest Addison’s observation later in the same issue that “present absence is timelike; absent presence is spacelike” (“Reminiscences” 125). In Addison’s reading of his own page, “the picture mood is romantic, whether or not the image is displaced,” but further, “the picture person is OTHER...” (62). The original model is absent in both time and space; the image itself is of an other, and is other both to the poet and to his writing. The writing itself is a “picture mood” of an absent other. And while there is much more to be made of this page, it must be read as finding that beyond of the blues that offers a response to Addison’s own question of Rosey Pool and her anthology: “which side of the blues is she going beyond?”

Lloyd Addison continued his radical aesthetic searching through each subsequent volume of *Beau-Cocoa*, a group project with a singular projection rising from the moment of the Black Arts. That Addison saw the journal as a serial projection of his own poetics becomes evident near the end of 1973’s combined issue eight and nine, where readers discover an “Inspirational Index” reminiscent of the then not yet published index to Zukofsky’s “A” and headed with a note referring to the issues of *Beau-Cocoa* as “The Works of LEA.” As if to further complicate matters, the words selected for the inspirational index are, we are told, a random choice. Here are found entries for “Integration” and “Inarticulate(ness),” for “Drugs (orientation)” and “Esthetics,” for “Surromanticism” (though not for “sursemantic”), for “Style,” for “Africa” and for “God (sexo-esthetic).”





That inspirational index was not the end of *Beau-Cocoa's* final volume, though. There is a beyond the index as Addison had found his beyond of the blues. The last poem *inside* the issue (an issue whose contents overflowed onto the back cover), a poem titled “Looking Black and Feeling Followed,” is far more than a black American man’s sense of being profiled in white America; it’s a looking forward to his own beyond, to the poetics that might follow him:

it’s gonna be a badddd-haddd!
Anti-precedent to follow hot...

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