

## William J. Harris: On "Black Art"

In the poem "Black Art" (first published in the *Liberator*, 1966) Baraka declares, "poems are bullshit unless they are / teeth or trees or lemons piled / on a step" (BMP, p. 116). For the new Baraka the black poem had to be an active agent, not a vehicle of escape to "another world." Yet even here Baraka's apparent rejection is only partial. In rejecting [Allen] Ginsberg's otherworldly poetics he employs the techniques and poetics of the imagist-objectivist tradition. Like the imagists-objectivists, Baraka wanted to place real objects in his poems. His intent, however, was radically different from that of his predecessors. While [William Carlos] Williams and [Ezra] Pound, for instance, wanted to place real objects in their poems because their antisymbolist stance mandated recreation of the things themselves, Baraka wanted to place real objects in his poems to create a black world that would reflect the lives of black people . . . Baraka wanted concrete images in his poems so that his black readers would recognize themselves and be inspired to revolt against their circumstances. Throughout the period when he changed from a Beat to a political poet, Baraka used objectivist techniques to signal the need to destroy the white world:

We want "poems that kill."

Assassin poems, Poems that shoot

Guns.

From *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic*. Copyright © 1985 by the University of Missouri Press.

### **Publication Status:**

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[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/amiri-baraka>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/william-j-harris>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/black-art>