

The Quintessential Jazz-Surrealist-Dadaist Poet Bob Kaufman: His Beat Aesthetics and Poetic Art of Dissent

by Karen Pressley

Gaining any understanding about the life of poet Bob Kaufman and how he influenced Beat culture would not be complete without also understanding how Beat culture influenced Kaufman. As I pieced together significant elements in my exploration of Kaufman and the Beats, I unearthed more than a connection with poetry of the 1950s – 1970s; I gained insight into a man who ran for cover as if to shield himself from the fallout of the unspeakable events of his time.

Remnants of Kaufman's background and literary legacy are strewn voluminously across the Internet. His story and works have emerged on a gamut of websites including American poetry, African-American history, American and European Beat studies, and university literature studies. In my search for answers to my queries about who influenced who, I would learn that the life experiences of an array of anarchist-literati warriors would influence Kaufman through their dissent, especially against using war as a tool for control of humankind at any cost. My discoveries unearthed Kaufman's aesthetic principles, how they speak to his experience of being an African-American poet in post-World War II America, and how his aesthetics informed his works, including his *Abomunist Manifesto*, his co-development of *Beatitude* Magazine, and other art that responded to the world within which he found himself. *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry* (1999) offers this condensed profile of him:

"Bob Kaufman was a street poet, a people's poet, a poet's poet. He was a multi-ethnic poet, an African American poet, a Beat poet, a surrealist poet, a jazz poet, a poete maudit, a New Orleans poet, a San Francisco poet. One of the founding architects and 'living examples' of the Beat generation as a literary, historical, and existential phenomenon...he has been overshadowed by white Beat writers like Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs..." (p. 63).

Background and influences informing Kaufman's art of dissent

New Orleans-born in 1927, Robert Garnell Kaufman's birth marked child number thirteen for his African-American-Catholic-schoolteacher mother from Martinique and his African-American- Jewish father. Added to that mix was a grandmother who practiced voodoo. Within his sea of siblings, Bob Kaufman's sensibilities were shaped by a diverse array of beliefs and practices. His mother's role as teacher in his life fostered his awareness of literature. Feeding him a steady diet of Proust, Melville and Henry James, mother insisted on instilling sophisticated literary capacities in her son. Mr. Kaufman, a Pullman porter on the railroad, involved himself in one of the most historic labor efforts in American history—the organization of the Black Pullman Porter Union. Serving as more than a labor union, the group used the railroad system to pique social awareness and counter discrimination issues by disseminating black culture, education, and political power to workers and passengers across the U.S.

Oriented by how his father's labor affiliations shaped his lifestyle, eighteen-year old Bob Kaufman joined America's labor force in the Merchant Marines in 1945. The Merchant Marines provided an outlet for the youngest Kaufman to involve himself in the turbulent organizing activities of several overlapping maritime unions, including his role as a labor orator for the Seaman's International Union, known then for its militantly leftist leanings. Building on the foundation of his mother's literary leanings, he cultivated his own tastes on long sea voyages, favoring Walt Whitman, Arthur Rimbaud, Federico Garcia Lorca, Hart Crane, Gertrude Stein, and Langston Hughes, to name a few (Lindberg, 2006). Kaufman immersed himself in the writings of this hand-picked collection of authors who became his influential companions at sea; their literary voices gradually shaped Kaufman's aesthetic of written self-expression.

When he left the Merchant Marines, Kaufman moved to New York to study literature at The New School, where he met writers William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. The three migrated to San Francisco where Kaufman met writers Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti at what became the center of the Beat scene in North Beach, California. Kaufman's assimilation into North Beach culture included his discovery of Buddhism, which gave him a new way of seeing and interpreting the world compared to his Judeo-Christian upbringing.

His new cadre of friends saw themselves as warriors in an apocalyptic battle to defeat forces of control unleashed by the establishment (capitalists) of the day, as well as defenders of the ultimate promise of America as expressed by Walt Whitman and Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. They evolved a belief in a connection between internal spirituality and transcendent laws that governed the workings of the cosmos. Ideas about spiritual freedom and individualism became connected to ideas about social transformation. In Kaufman's time of post-World War II America, McCarthy-led anti-Communism paranoia instilled the nation and crushed political dissent. When the AFL-CIO emerged in the 1950s, Kaufman was "purged" in the anti-communism efforts that swept through the labor movement during the McCarthy years (Kaufman & Griffin, 1999).

Kaufman develops his Beat aesthetics

Numerous accounts of Beat life suggest that Kaufman's aesthetics, along with other Beat artists, were shaped by living poetically. What does it mean to live poetically? Does poetic living have a recognizable rhythm or a form? Were their lives defined by stanzas and paused by commas, their experiences halted by periods and exclamation points, or left unpunctuated?

If the Beats lived poetically, it was not in conformity with conventional form. Kaufman and his friends' aesthetics emerged through a co-created religious philosophy that defined their lifestyle, behavior and worldview: they wove the elements of insight together into their own brand of sensibility, an embodied set of ideas, a religiosity that brought urgency and ultimacy to their existence. They were buoyed by a sage curiosity and a youthful enthusiasm for rectifying life's problems through a universal religious ethic and humanitarian politics of their own definition. This religious sensibility became their platform through which they believed and lived, a space for living in a real world of their own creation, serving as a filter through which they experienced the world at large. The content of their religion was embodied in their lifestyle and behavior, experimenting

with a plethora of hallucinogenics and other street drugs, heavy alcohol consumption, living communally or by way of their own design in railroad cars, under the nearest cozy highway overpass or in a friend's reclusive mountain cabin, and experimenting with sexual expression that crossed boundaries of race and gender. They became defined by their dissent expressed in original spontaneous prose through images and metaphors used to characterize reality in their artistic works including poems, novels, live recordings, Kerouac's word sketching and wild forms, Ginsberg's spontaneous prose and poetry, Burrough's cut-ups, and Kaufman's live poetry readings both on stages and in the streets.

Embodying dissent in his early lifestyle through his father's role model and his own personal labor efforts became an aspect of Kaufman's aesthetic, which developed into poetic living of his own design, through written and oral self-expression, keeping himself free to create poetry while not holding down a job. Bonding over their mutual attraction to Spengler, Kaufman and friends formed a creative nucleus by dwelling on the imperfection of the present while holding onto hope for the future. In those years, dissent seemed to be an effective way to publicly affirm one's rights to be "different" from post-World War II American mainstream pro-capitalist, anti-Communist thought.

By 1959, Kaufman co-developed *Beatitude* magazine with Allen Ginsberg, John Kelley, and William Margolis with help from "Pike, Uranovitz, Delattre, Garnder, Gould..." (*Beatitude*, 2006), a poetic labor intended to help launch the careers of many aspiring poets, in the tradition of the Beat underground movement, through printed publications and eventually, online. The *Beatitude* philosophy embraces the ideology that, if we as a culture are involved in poetry and its message, we will not be involved in war: "One beautiful poem in a lifetime can speak for an individual existence, for all time." *Beatitude* poetry was "a weekly miscellany of poetry and other jazz designed to extol beauty and promote the beatific or poetic life among the various mendicants, neo-existentialists, christis, poets, painters, musicians and other inhabitants of North Beach, San Francisco, California, United States of North America" (*Beatitude*, 2006).

To disseminate poetry into the hands of hungry poets, broadsides were first printed on an old mimeograph machine and sold on the street for 35 cents, a price even street poets could afford. The *Beatitude* publication progressed as a movement where local poets contributed numbers of poems, artwork, and photography, from which one was usually published in an issue. Weekly issues were handmade and the numbers were limited. The *Beatitude* broadsides became a significant vehicle for poets to get their works out who could not get published through established publishing houses. Some of Kaufman's first works were printed through *Beatitude*, as well as Ginsberg's. Kaufman's poetry collection, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, is comprised of three earlier broadsides printed through *Beatitude*: *Does the Secret Mind Whisper?*, *Second April*, and the *Abomunist Manifesto*. Today, *Beatitude* is still online at www.bestofsanfrancisco.net, and offers archival materials as well as current. Through the Internet, *Beatitude* seeks a wider voice from the global community of poets. "One poem at a time will be added to an ongoing Beat-attitude that will create a record of poetic voices on the earth, outwards, into the universe, forever" (*Beatitude*, 2006).

Prose and poetry became the Beats' weapons against war. Works like Ginsberg's *Howl*, Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, and Kaufman's collections in *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* and

Cranial Guitar tout dissention through their oppositional art like a weapon against poverty, capitalism, racial discrimination, and the violence of global competition for superpower status and global hegemony. Kaufman's aesthetic of communicating his views honestly through poetry attempted to get into people's faces and stay there. He recited his poetry live in bars, coffeehouses, and on the streets approaching people in cars, earning himself the nickname, "Bebop Man." Author Ken Kesey told *Digital Interviews* about seeing Bob Kaufman on the streets of San Francisco's North Beach during a visit there in the 1950s:

"I can remember driving down to North Beach with my folks and seeing Bob Kaufman out there on the street...He had little pieces of Band-Aid tape all over his face, about two inches wide, and little smaller ones like two inches long—and all of them made into crosses. He came up to the cars, babbling poetry into the windows. He came up to the car I was riding in, and started jabbering this stuff into the car. I knew that this was exceptional use of the human voice and the human mind."

As Kesey notes, Kaufman's aesthetic included his exceptional use of the human voice and the human mind throughout his artistic works. He embraced the orality of poetry as part of a living art form that went beyond the boundaries of the printed page. He was known as a legendary performer in the memorialized street scenes of North Beach as well as New York's Greenwich Village from the 1950s through late 1970s. The impact of his poetry as it relates to his aesthetic performance of it brings into play a direct interplay between the poet and the audience. Rather than a distanced, abstract poetry of the classic, formal, or printed "literary" type, Kaufman as a Beat poet engaged his audience's senses in poetry of the body. Lee Hudson, in "Poetics in performance: The Beat Generation" (1977) has examined the oral aspect as it relates to the poetic performance of the Beats. Kaufman related to ancient bardic traditions and sought to bring their poetry directly to the people, like a resurgence of an oral tradition of performance. Kaufman's poetry, then, depended in large part on more than print; performance was essential, like part of the compositional process (Peditto, 2006). In 1965, Kaufman played a small role in a movie, "The Flower Thief," shot in North Beach. In the early 1970s, he appeared on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" four times.

Kaufman is best known for short lyric poems in African American (Langston Hughes, ed, *The New Negro Poetry*, 1964, being the first) and avant-garde anthologies (*New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, #17, 1967, covering poetry and prose; *The Portable Beat Reader*, 1992). Works originally published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore are collected in two *New Directions* publications, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965) and *The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956-1978* (Lindberg, 2006).

Kaufman's use of the human voice was not limited to verbal expression; he found other ways to express its power. In 1963, around the time of his addiction to methedrine and his imprisonment for drug possession, and President John F. Kennedy's assassination, Kaufman was prompted to take a Buddhist vow of silence. For nearly ten years, he withdrew from society. He rarely spoke again, until 1973. On the day the Vietnam War ended, he walked into a coffee shop and recited, "All Those Ships that Never Sailed" (*Poets*, 1997). Following this burst of expression, a period of intense activity and productivity ensued; however, Kaufman again withdrew into solitude in 1978, when he told editor Raymond Foye that he only sought anonymity. "I want to be anonymous...my ambition is to be completely forgotten" (*Poets*, 1997). Anonymity, a condition he perceived as

an aesthetic, stood in opposition to what he considered ugliness—fame and social respectability. The following excerpt expresses his sentiments:

“He had stated he wanted to be anonymous—partly out of choice and out of disillusioned resignation and the ravage of street life. He turned his back on the seductions of fame and respectability, implicitly declaring solidarity with the world’s anonymous poor” (Kaufman & Griffin, 1999).

During Kaufman’s years of silence, others worked busily to collect his writings and assemble them into publishable form. Foye said Kaufman took no part in publishing his work, and held an aversion to even writing his poems down. He wanted to live a simple life, a man amongst his friends. As Kaufman developed his poetry through the years, he chose not to keep a journal or write letters as a means of documenting his views, unlike the other Beats who scrambled to copy each others’ works on everything from rolls of teletype paper to stacks of napkins. Kaufman’s desire to remain undocumented underlined his desired state of anonymity rather than being in the spotlight. Some of his works were recorded by friends on tape, collected on scraps of paper, and otherwise written down by friends and/or his wife Eileen.

The collection of Kaufman’s handwritten poems comprising *Ancient Rain: Poems from 1956-1968*, was discovered by Raymond Foye in the smoldering ruins of a burnt-out San Francisco hotel where Kaufman had lived and just escaped the disaster. Foye’s story about the hotel turned to cinders is likely indicative of Kaufman’s disregard for literary fame that sought traditional status and permanence. *Ancient Rain*, edited and introduced by Foye, includes poems written prior to his vow of silence as well as new work from 1973-1978 before he lapsed into silence again and seldom broke his vow until his death on January 12, 1986 in San Francisco. Foye said of the *Ancient Rain* collection,

“...with his extemporaneous technique, is akin in many ways to surrealist automatic writing. Kaufman has produced a body of work ranging from a visionary lyricism infused with satirical almost Dadaist elements to a prophetic poetry of political and social protest.”

Kaufman’s poem, *Ancient Rain*, is just one example from the whole collection, offering a recurring theme of political and social protest involving the life and times of Crispus Attucks. Significant to American and African-American history as the first American patriot to die in the Revolutionary War (African-American Registry, 1999), Attucks had been a slave at an estate outside of Boston in 1723. Stories about him say that he managed to escape and get a job as a harpoonist on a whaling boat. While on shore at the Boston docks in March, 1770, he heard bells chiming through Boston, ringing out to call people to the Commons. Was Attucks in the wrong place at the wrong time? Stories give conflicting accounts of Attucks being shot in an alley while others say he was shot at the Commons. In any case, thus marks the day when Attucks and other patriots gathered, with Attucks known as the first man shot by British soldiers. A few among Kaufman’s seven references to Attucks include:

“...the Ancient Rain that fell when Nathan Hale died. It shall be the brown rain that fell on the day Crispus Attucks died...” (133)

“...and who refused to go to school with Crispus Attucks, the Ancient Rain knows they were starving in Europe. The Ancient Rain is falling...” (135)

"...the Ancient Rain did not see them in America when Crispus Attucks was falling before the British guns in the Boston commons. The Ancient Rain is falling again..." (136)

Kaufman memorializes Attucks throughout his work as a runaway slave with the courage to fight for his freedom and ability to speak out, reminding Americans that the independence they enjoy was not free, and came at a great price. Did Kaufman memorialize Attucks' rebellion, or was he living vicariously through the man's lifestyle of dissent, and refusal to succumb to oppression? Poet John Boyle O'Reilly read his poem at the dedication of Attucks' monument in 1888, perhaps expressing Kaufman's sentiments:

"Honor to Crispus Attucks, who was leader and voice that day;
The first to defy, and the first to die, with Maverick, Carr, and Gray.
Call it riot or revolution, his hand first clenched at the crown:
His feet were the first in perilous place to pull the King's flag down;
His breast was the first one rent apart that liberty's stream might flow;
For our freedom now and forever, his head was the first laid low.
Call it riot or revolution, or mob or crowd, as you may,
Such deaths have been seed of nations, such lives
Shall be honored for aye." (O'Reilly, 1888).

The Quintessential Jazz-Surrealist-Dadaist Poet

Though Kaufman is essentially an oral poet, his creations have also, understandably, been compared to the compositions of jazz musicians, creators and improvisers in the moment of performance. Kaufman's close acquaintance with and appreciation for jazz musicians includes Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus, and underscores his own aesthetic (Peditto, 2006). Their influence—particularly jazz syncopation and meter—on his poetry were evident in Kaufman's poetic structure and style as well as content and theme. Foye said, "Adapting the harmonic complexities and spontaneous invention of bebop to poetic euphony and meter, he became the quintessential jazz poet" (Foye, 1986). In this way, Kaufman as a jazz poet reflects the connection of modern jazz musicians with oral traditions. His poetry is capable of ecstatic solo flights of word jazz in *Solitudes* and *Golden Sardine*, expressed like lyrical wails. *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* is filled with jazz poems, including "Walking Parker Home," "West Coast Sounds 1956," "Bagel Shop Jazz," "Blues Note," "Hollywood," "Mingus," "San Francisco Beat," and numerous others. In one poem from *Golden Sardine*, "Cocoa Morning," the sound patterns match the words in a jazz-like feel:

Drummer, hummer, on the floor,
Dreaming of wild beats, softer still,
Yet free of violent city noise,
Please, sweet morning,
Stay here forever. (Kaufman, 1986)

In "Modern American Poetry," Lindberg (2006) quotes poet Jack Micheline analogizing Kaufman's work to jazz, surrealism and Dadaism, as:

"...essentially improvisational, and was at its best when accompanied by a jazz musician. His technique resembled that of the surreal school of poets, ranging from powerful, visionary lyricism of satirical, near Dadaistic leanings, the more prophetic tone that can be found in his political poems" (Lindberg, 2006).

One excerpt from his *Cranial Guitar* collection (posthumously assembled and published), "Tequila Jazz," expresses his passion for jazz as if it pumps his very heart but also consumes him:

"...unseen wings of jazz, flapping, flapping.
Carry me off, carry me off. Dirt of a
world covers me, my secret heart,
beating with unheard jazz.
Their melody ropes
entwine my neck,
hanging with
tequila smiles,
hanging, man, hanging."

The following excerpt from "Walking Parker Home" seems to be in a format with content more representative of a work based on a jazz syncopation, mixed with Dadaist random thoughts and powerfully visionary surrealistic word combinations and images:

"Sweet beats of jazz impaled on slivers of wind
Kansas Black Morning/First Horn Eyes/
Historical sound pictures on New Bird wings
People shouts/boy alto dreams/tomorrow's
Gold belled pipe of stops and future/Blues Times
Lurking Hawkins/shadows of Lester/realization
Bronze fingers—brain extensions seeking trapped sounds
Ghetto thoughts/bandstand courage/solo flight
Nerve-wracked suspicious of newer songs and doubts
New York altar city/black tears/secret disciples
Hammer horn pounding soul marks on unswinging gates
Culture gods/mob sounds/visions of spikes
Panic excursions to tribal Jazz wombs and transfusions
Heroin nights of birth/and soaring/over boppy new ground." (Kaufman, 1965).

Dadaist literature was a style of poetry in the art of randomness that "revolted against a world that man's intelligence had failed to control" (Schemool, 1996). The writings are a barrage of random words melded together toward a humorous, yet shocking type of approach toward the reader, sometimes using coarse, harsh words to conceive a random notion that makes the reader have to think to get across the excessive ramblings. As the Dadaist movement came to a close, the Surrealist poets attempted to plumb their own sub-conscious. They used the Dadaist thinking process to give themselves a better understanding of their own sub-conscious. By using a technique called *automatism*, the Surrealist poets captured every passing thought on paper without concern for sense or grammar. This has given visual form when Surrealist artists allowed their pens to wander during trance-like states. An example of Kaufman's work in Dada style, from "Sullen Bakeries of Total Recall:"

"And how many Ophelias escaped from Ruth's letter? Are

teenage cancellations out? ...here, here's my brain
 receipt, take my skin check, I want Juliet on the hoof.
 Because of what happened, sex is holy by virtue of
 arithmetic and welcome dampness." (Kaufman, 1965:42).

Kaufman's surrealistic usage of language in many of his works seems to be a way for him to tell readers to take another look, see things in a different way. In one line, he'll put two things together that don't fit (conventionally). His break of convention is an aspect of his aesthetic of dissent, as if he's trying to deviate from the way we've been trained to see, to undo our conventional orientation. An excerpt from Kaufman's poem "Matriculation" shows his surrealistic style:

"Kilted piano players playing suggestive minuets on gaily
 decorated triangles
 (the music should build to the climax then explode
 Like overloaded creampuffs).
 Skinny porters dusting off the heaving bodies with velvet
 cactus leaves
 (the period just after fertilization is important
 to the victim's future). (Kaufman, 1965:41).

Schemool cites an example of Dadaism contradictory rhetoric as that of Tristan Tzara who wrote a manifesto wherein he claimed he was against manifestos. Kaufman penned his own manifesto, *The Abomunist Manifesto*, which seems Dadaist in that it is paradoxical for a man to proclaim a manifesto who also revered anonymity and silence. *Abomunist Manifesto* sustains a critique of the subtle rules and terrible punishments that, as he knew them, enforce American bourgeois, hegemonic values of race, class, sexuality, and rationality in society (Lindberg, 2006). Answering McCarthyism, Beat, and Black Arts manifestos with Dadaist anarchism and surrealist irrationalism, "Abomunism" (his contraction of, among other things, communism, atom bomb, Bob Kaufman, and abomination) (Lindberg, 2006), is serious in its "black humor." From the late 1960s onward, through stretches of withdrawal and suffering the ill effects of political blacklisting (his 1950s purging) and harassment, alcohol, drugs, electroshock treatments, and imprisonment, Kaufman recorded both with humor and pathos the pain of society's victims. His three Abomunist papers (*Abomunist Manifesto*, *Second April* and *Does the Secret Mind Whisper?*), are each an anarcho-surreal parody of all 'isms' and issued under the name 'Bomkauf', and argue for a Beat-derived 'rejectionary philosophy' (Lee, 1996). As he puts matters in *Abomunist Manifesto*:

ABOMUNIST POETS CONFIDENT THAT THE NEW LITERARY FORM "FOOTPRINTISM" HAS FREED THE ARTIST OF OUTMODED RESTRICTIONS SUCH AS: THE ABILITY TO READ AND WRITE, OR THE DESIRE TO COMMUNICATE, MUST BE PREPARED TO READ THEIR WORK AT DENTAL COLLEGES, EMBALMING SCHOOLS, HOMES FOR UNWED MOTHERS, HOMES FOR WED MOTHEs, INSANE ASYLUMS, USO CANTEENS, KINDERGARTENS, AND COUNTY JAILS. ABOMUNISTS NEVER COMPROMISE THEIR REJECTIONARY PHILOSOPHY. (Kaufman, 1965).

Throughout the 1950s and '60s, when *Beatitude*, and then Lawrence Ferlinghetti at City Lights Bookstore, first published his 'Abomunist' poems and broadsides, his often jazz-accompanied, Dadaist poetry readings and

legendary 'happenings' won him the reputation of San Francisco's own one-off Bohemian, as well as the credit for coining the term "beatnik" with journalist Herb Caen (Lee, 1996).

Aesthetic principles shared with Euro-American Beat writers

In the early 1960s, Kaufman was one of the most popular American poets among European readers, largely due to his popularizing European modernist developments. This included surrealism and existential philosophy through his Beat attitudes and philosophies in his surreal poetry, and the blending of these European influences with African-American themes and structures, including poetry reflecting the rhythms of bebop jazz. "Although Kaufman writes in Standard English laden with allusions to Camus, Picasso, and Miro, he also employs street language, Black American verbal structures (rapping, running it down, and signifying) and jazz modalities in his verse" (Nilon, 1993). Kaufman's poem, "Camus: I Want to Know," with its surreal references to European artists, locations, and historical incidents, is one example that labels him as a French surrealist and existentialist (excerpt):

"Camus, I want to know, does the cold knife of wind plunge
Noiselessly into the soul, finally
Camus, I want to know, does the seated death wing as sudden,
swifter than leaden Fascist bullets...
Camus, sand-faced rebel from Olympus, brain lit, shining
Cleanly, on far historical peaks...
Camus, I want to know, does the jagged fender resemble
Franco, standing spiked at Madrid's Goyaesque wound..." (Kaufman, 1965:46).

His content and writing style likened him to Arthur Rimbaud, which earned Kaufman the nickname from the Europeans, "the American Rimbaud." Rimbaud, a gifted "enfant terrible" of nineteenth-century French poetry, who penned works of improvisational rhyme schemes, is thought by many to have altered the course of French literature, and lived poetically, as if paralleling Kaufman's drug-and-alcohol-filled life. Born in 1854, Rimbaud's family lived in Charleville, France. His military father abandoned his family at Rimbaud's young age, which prompted his mother to send him to a private institute where he was raised. He was schooled there and excelled in rhetoric. In 1871, after France waged war on Prussia, he began running away for random periods of time. He fled to Paris and roamed to Belgium, Brussels, and in and out of Charleville. Rimbaud sympathized with the war insurgents, and wrote poetry to express his feelings about the cruelties and injustices of war. Some of his early, best known works include "Parisian Song of War" and "Paris is Repeopled." Rimbaud became an anarchist, known for violence, heavy drinking, and scandalous behavior. Until 1879, he wandered throughout Europe, mostly on foot, in and out of jails while continuing to write.

French writer Maulpoix (1991) describes Arthur Rimbaud in such a way that makes it easy to see parallels between him and Bob Kaufman:

"Rimbaud carries on his face that kind of sulky heart which remains incarcerated within the poem. His countenance lodges its complaint. Having become legendary, his ill-tempered life indeed tells how tiring it may have become to dream one's own existence...for Arthur's story is quite an ordinary one for he who is used to pen-pushing: it is the story of a cantilevered life unable to find any place to dwell and settle...an anathema, Rimbaud never knew comfort...Rimbaud offers the example of he who would let

himself be rolled like meatballs in flour by poetry which is both a matter of solitude and of cliques..." (Maulpoix, 1991).

Thinking about Kaufman in and out of jail for drug possession and other sundry charges, had his become an ill-tempered life, as tiring for him as Maulpoix thought it had become for Rimbaud? As a seeker of anonymity, it seems that Kaufman preferred to be without a place to dwell and settle, choosing a cantilevered life as the more favorable option than Maulpoix' conjectures about Rimbaud. Should the lives of Rimbaud and Kaufman be remembered as ordinary for those who are used to pen-pushing? Perhaps Maulpoix could not conceive that either of these men could find comfort in anything, not in the fleeting moments of performance, nor in finished works that reached the ears and eyes of fellow poets.

Kaufman's poetry collection, *The Golden Sardine* (1967), was translated into French and became influential in Europe. The French and South American translations have earned Kaufman a wide reputation abroad (Lindberg, 2006). In 1961, Kaufman was nominated for England's Guinness Poetry Award, but lost to T.S. Eliot. One poem by Craig Moore describes Kaufman as the black Rimbaud:

Night of Saxophones (1)
for Bobby Kaufman

His name was carved outside
in the cement, permanent eighty-six

he appeared out of nowhere
I knew his old Beat friend, Harry
poet of poets, Bobby black Rimbaud

his disappearing words, appeared
out of thin air their nuance talked
that way of talking, without saying
anything, he gesticulated the essence

that said so much more than the words
themselves, their silent resonance
floated on the thick air, said so much more

...
I use to see him bopping down by Broadway dig?

Memorializing Bob Kaufman

Following Kaufman's death, friend Neeli Cherkovski published *Elegy for Bob Kaufman* (Cherkovski, 1996). In "Elegy One," he wrote:

Angelo the landlord
Doesn't want Bob Kaufman's wiry ghost
Wandering on his gyroling hallway's
Italian steps: "That man
Is a crazy poet." Rozzelini's hawk eyes glow
As he lifts the broom
Now warrior's lance aimed at the wall.
I run to the streets for reference
Renowned windows shine

Rubicon eyelids flutter
 People possess dreams of the Nile
 My childhood song
 Fell into the River Styx
 Conversation flows in the bayous
 Of our cluttered yards
 We're tickled by the distant snow.
 You might find Bob on a concrete raft."

It's fitting that a friend of Kaufman's would memorialize him by using a similar humor and surrealistic imagery as found throughout Kaufman's works. While Kaufman kept no diary, recorded in no journals, published no literary essays, wrote no reviews and maintained no correspondence, nevertheless, schools of poetry have sung him praises. Recognized as a major figure in the Beat generation of writers and poets, known as a leading poet of the black consciousness movement, and the embodiment in the French tradition of the poet as outsider, madman, and outcast.

Kaufman showed us a way to interpret war through dissent. As the *Underworld* (1997) character Don DeLillo remarked about the history of the cold war, "We all tried to think about war but I'm not sure we knew how to do this. The Poets wrote long poems with dirty words and that's as close as we came, actually, to a thoughtful response. Because they had brought something into the world that out-imagined the mind" (Lardas, p. 3).

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