Ed Bullins (1935- ) is one of the most gifted and certainly the most prolific of the Black American dramatists. He emerged from the Black Arts Movement of the Late 1960s and early 1970s. He rapidly gained prominence because of his central role in the period’s most exciting and influential theater, the New Lafayette Theater in Harlem. Nurtured by the Black Arts Movement, Bullins understood the aim of the Theatre perfectly and helped it to develop its distinctive quality and style. He is the author of over fifty plays. At least twenty-nine of them are published and at least forty of them have been professionally produced. His influence on Black Theatre is not confined to his own plays only, it also leads to several initiations to edit anthologies of the new Black drama, such as, Drama Review. Black theatre Issue (Summer 1968), which became a manifesto for the Black Arts Movement. Bullins often says that he began writing because it was the only thing he could do well and that he began writing plays because they came to him most easily. Bullins, in his plays characterizes himself as a “street nigger” and values and even romanticizes, the fundamental concreteness of street life. There is much of the aggression of the “street nigger” in his writings. He says that his plays are vehicles for starting discussions with his audiences. They are more likely to provoke fights which he has called to be “play in the real world”.
He was born in Philadelphia on 2 July 1935, to Bertha Marie Queen and Edward Bullins. Raised in north Philadelphia's Black ghetto, Bullins loved the street life which is the subject of so many of his plays. However, Bullins frequently warns against turning to his writing for factual details of his life and against identifying him with any one of his characters. Thus the tenor, if not the exact substance of his early years emerges from several of his plays as well as from his short stories, collected in *The Hungered One: Early writing* (1971) and from his novel *The Reluctant Rapist* (1937).

Raised by his mother, who seems to have encouraged his schooling as well as the reflective and critical aspects of his nature, the adolescent Bullins fought his way through school and neighbourhood life. An episode which appears in *The Reluctant Rapist*, and to which Bullins often alludes, his near death as a result of being stabbed in a fight; Bullins considers his survival to be very much associated with a task and a destiny meant for Black people.

In 1952, shortly after quitting high school, Bullins joined the navy. Of that period in his life, two details are known: he won the lightweight boxing championship on one of the ships of the Mediterranean fleet and, feeling himself poorly equipped for the world, began reading. In 1955, he returned to Philadelphia and enrolled in night school. Bullins kept the details of his next three years particularly well hidden, but *The Reluctant Rapist* suggests he was deeply enmeshed in a problemsome time. He has commented that his 1958 departure for Los Angeles quite literally saved his life. When he left Philadelphia, he left behind an unsuccessful marriage and several children.
In Los Angeles, Bullins enrolled at Los Angeles City College. While his formal participation in classes seems to have been erratic, he read extensively and began writing short stories and poetry, briefly editing *Citadel*, a magazine he started for campus writers. In his fiction Bullins records that in Los Angeles he first came in contact with a segment of black society he had rarely encountered: intellectuals committed to the study of black culture and history and engaged in various forms of cultural and political activity. In Philadelphia, he had encountered and rejected the black middle class finding them pretentious and vacuous, but the street people he preferred became suspicious of him when he displayed insights gained from his reading and travels. His new friends in Los Angeles encouraged his intellectual curiously and artistic pursuits.

He came to prominence in 1964 when he enrolled himself in the creative writing program at San Francisco State College and then wrote plays. His first play is *How Do You Do?* (1965) which is a short play. Bullins wrote two more plays, in rapid succession. They are *Dialect Determinism (Or The Rally)* and *Clara's Ole Man* (both 1965). Each of these early plays foreshadowed a direction for his later works. The overt and self-conscious absurdist aspects of *How Do you Do?* are reflected in his *The Gentleman Caller* (1969). However, less extreme but clearly absurdist treatments of human situations frequently punctuate his later works like *The Electronic Nigger* (1968). *The Pig Pen* (1970).

Unable to find anyone in San Francisco and interested in producing these early plays, Bullins formed several companies and produced them himself in lofts, bars, and coffeehouses. Although the themes of these plays are clear, he felt himself without artistic bearings until he saw a 1965 San Francisco production of
Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman and The Toilet*. Bullins sensed immediately that Baraka's artistic purpose validated his own. The Baraka production galvanized him and a substantial group of other political revolutionaries and writers (among them Huey Newton, Booby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Marvin X, Sonia Sanchez, and Baraka himself) into setting up the Black House, an organization dedicated to both political and cultural activity. The Black House had an alliance with a political party called The Black Panther Party. But the Black House dissolved over severe disagreements between those activists who saw art only as a weapon and supported coalition with radical whites to gain political ends and the artists who defined their task as cultural nationalism and kept away from any coalition with whites. Bullins sided with the second group, writing later in *The Theme Is Blackness* (1973) that the artists were the single body able to maintain a community institution and dedicated to positive community education and cultural-political organization. The organisation's demise, particularly what he characterized as the fratricide, left Bullins bitter. Again he was at loose ends, until a young black director, Robert Macbeth, who had read some of Bullins's plays, invited him to join the newly established New Lafayette Theatre in Harlem. Bullins agreed, and in 1967 he left California for New York.

Robert Macbeth had been struggling since the early 1960s to establish a community-based theater in Harlem. However in January 1968, fire destroyed the theater and the New Lafayette's third production was mounted downtown at the American Place Theatre. It consisted of three plays by Ed Bullins. The production was called *The Electronic Nigger and Others* :Later the title was changed to *Three*
Plays by Ed Bullins. Well received, the plays introduced New York audience to the full range of Bullins' talent.

Bullins remained central to the New Lafayette Company from the time he arrived in New York until its demise for lack of funds in late 1972. He served first as its playwright-in-residence and later as associate director. When the company moved into its new theater on 137th Street, it opened with Bullins's first full-length play, *In the Wine Time* (produced in 1968), and later premiered *Goin' A Buffalo* (produced in 1968), *The Duplex* (produced in 1970), and *The Fabulous Miss Marie* (produced in 1971). Bullins also listed himself as author of the company's more communally developed rituals, *The Devil Catchers* (produced in 1970) and *The Psychic Pretenders* (produced in 1972). In the spring of 1969, the company offered its most controversial play, *We Righteous Bombers*, credited to Kingsley Bass, Jr. (a twenty-four-year-old Black man killed by Detroit police during the uprising of 1967). The play questions whether any form of revolutionary activity that results in blacks killing blacks accomplishes more than to further the wishes of the oppressor. *We Righteous Bombers* provoked bitter attack; and became the subject of a heated symposium held at the theater on 11 May 1969, the transcription of the play was published in *Black Theatre*, issue number 4, the magazine Bullins edited for the New Lafayette theatre. The problem was whether black writers should challenge revolutionary activity without providing alternative directions and resolutions within their work. Notable among those who defended the play were Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, while those attacking the play were represented by Askia Muhammad Toure and Ernie Mkalimoto. Marvin X explicitly and other speakers implicitly attributed the play to Bullins.
who denied the play was his. Characteristically, Bullins absented himself from the symposium.

While the New Lafayette Theatre provided Bullins with brilliant productions of his works, it was not unique because many theaters in New York eagerly sought the opportunity to produce his plays. Between 1968 and 1980, at least twenty-five of Bullins's plays were produced in New York, fifteen before 1973. Ten plays were produced by the New Lafayette; the rest were at an impressive array of theaters all over the city, including the La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, the New Federal Theatre of Henry Street Settlement House, the Public Theatre, the American Place Theatre, the Workshop of the Players Art, and Lincoln Centre. In 1971, Bullins received a Black Arts Alliance Award for *In New England Winter* and an Obie Award for *The Fabulous Miss Marie*; in 1975, *The Taking of Miss Janie* brought him the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Reviewers gave his work careful and often perceptive attention, particularly Mel Gussow and Barnes of the *New York Times* and Edith Oliver of the *New Yorker*. Bullins also received institutional support from various sources: an American Place Theatre grant (1964); two Guggenheim fellowships (1971, 1976); three Rockefeller grants (1968, 1970, 1972); a Creative Artists Public Service Program Award (1973), and an honorary Doctor of Letters from Columbia College in Chicago (1976).

With the New Lafayette Bullins developed his style and purpose. The company's dedication to serving its community, to presenting a theater viable to those living outside its doors, created the perfect setting for Bullins's plays. The young Black Director, Robert Macbeth defined the New Lafayette's sense of...
audience in this manner: "there is no audience, and no actors.. the separation is very slim, all the people who come to 'the Room' come to be in the 'play' because their being there is part of the play." The intimacy implied by Macbeth's definition characterizes many of Bullins's works of this period, which require, even assume, an audience willing not only to recognize themselves in the activities of the play, but to be challenged by and to respond to them. While some of Bullins's plays also invite response from white members of an audience, most of them concern themselves with defining the world of and for a black audience. As several reviews of New Lafayette productions noted, white members of an audience felt themselves intruders not because his plays attacked whites but because they ignored them.

Many of Bullins's plays not only invite dialogue with the actors and identification with their characters, but they challenge the audience to use the occasion of the play to extend its own sense of community to the world beyond the theater. And further, many of his plays build their themes by alluding to and introducing characters from other plays that have gone before them. Since the early 1970s, Bullins has been engaged in writing what he calls his Twentieth-Century Cycle, a series of twenty plays (six of which have been written) whose purpose Bullins says is "to recreate reality in a new atmosphere, giving a fresh illumination, a fresh view of things, and an extending vision. It will just tell the stories, with the hope that the stories will touch the audience in an individual way, with some fresh insight into their own lives, and help them to consider the weight of their experiences. For Bullins, the test of a play is, to a large measure, what it provokes in his audience."
After the dissolution of the New Lafayette, Bullins remained in New York, living in the Bronx with his third wife, Trixie Warner Bullins, and their children. In 1973, he was playwright-in-residence at the American Place Theatre, and from 1975 to 1983 he was on the staff of the New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theatre Writers Unit, where he coordinated the play writing workshops and served as press assistant. Bullins lectured and taught at various colleges and universities around the country. He also wrote two children's plays, *I am Lucy Terry* (produced in 1976) and *The Mystery of Phillis Wheatley* (produced in 1976), and the books for two musicals, *Sepia Star* (produced in 1977) and *Storyville* (produced in 1977), the music for which was composed by Mildred Kayden. He even ventured onto the state as an actor. Since 1983, he has been living in the San Francisco area, teaching and writing.

Bullins writes in many styles and has directed his attention to various issues of the Black Americans. Bullins is always a moralist he probes and questions clinches, accepted values, stereotypes, and romantic illusions to test what is of value in them. His basic concern is with black people, their values, hopes, aspirations and dreams. However, several characteristics are constant in his works, whether his plays are deliberately didactic, agitprop, or what he calls, plays of black experience. Constant in his work is a questioning of the meaning of the idea of a people, a community, and its various definitions; the ideological definitions generated by the black nationalist movement of the 1960s and early 1970s; the traditional definitions of family and kinship networks; street definitions evolved from the partnerships and loyalties of neighbourhood and
street life; the looser definition suggested simply by the phrase with which he often concludes his list of characters: the people in his plays are Black.

A wanderer himself, Bullins sets his plays all over the United States: Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Newport, and the eastern shore of Maryland. However, geography in Bullins's plays is superceded by a more important location, the black nation which exists wherever black people are. They and Bullins, create an imaginative and subjective sense of place through their music, language, and perceptions of the world. They transform geographic place into their own territory. Bullins frequently asserts he does not write realistic plays, regardless of the style in which they are written. For example, his characters frequently drift freely between time frames, or even step out of the play to address the audience; Bullins knows it is on such imaginative realities that not only a culture but also a political and social identity can be built.

Intrinsic to the imaginative world of a Bullins' play is black music: it always either comes from a radio or from an actual musical group which sits on the stage and even takes part in the action. Jazz, blues (for which he often writes the lyrics), and gospel music becomes the context for his characters' activities, providing another dimension to their meaning. Language, too, provides more than realistic detail; it defines the sensibility of his people. Moreover, his plays are often punctuated by long monologues through which characters define themselves with a precision made possible by Bullins's artistic perfection. Street Sounds (produced in 1970), and House Party, and A Soul Happening (produced in 1973), consist entirely of monologues through which the mosaic of the black community emerges.
Early in his career, Bullins was criticized for concentrating on black street characters. He replied that they held no romantic fascination for him but were simply the people he had known best. He then dealt with characters from all walks of life, and yet many of his best plays are those about street life because within that setting Bullins finds some of his most basic questions articulated. Principally, Bullins questions the possibility of freedom, and he explores it by examining situations in which characters are bound by illusory chains of their own making, and suggesting that they will be in a position to free themselves if they can become conscious of their illusions. For Bullins, the great dangers are two: illusion and the betrayal of community. Betrayal of community occurs when people cling to their illusions. Bullins feels that it is their world which prepares a black man for a single skill: treachery to his brothers; hence the measure of his characters is their capacity for loyalty to others, and their downfall often occurs because their loyalty is misplaced.

Such issues emerge with radical concreteness in the world of the streets where the thwarted ambitions of the dispossessed—ambitions material in their form, but far from realization—take on spiritual significance. They come to signify the restless yearnings of all Bullins's characters, whether they are poets and musicians, pimps and petty criminals, whores, or wives, and girl friends who seek only love and security from men unwilling or unable to provide either. Whether his characters vent their frustrations through wine, drugs, romantic illusions, or violence, they find neither satisfaction nor safety. In Bullins's plays the sense of danger, of impending violence that comes from within the characters and that
often erupts, but never cleanses the air, defines the existential condition of his people.

Parties frequently occur in Bullins' plays; in fact, the basis for several plays is a party where Bullins studies the possibilities of people coming together and how they themselves destroy the potential fruitfulness of their gathering. Bullins never suggests how human aspirations can be made concrete, how ambitions can be realized, in part because he questions whether yet in America anyone, black or white, has managed to construct a society in which human longings are fulfilled. This failure to answer the question is not simply a manifestation of his undeniable romanticism; it also arises from his insistence on asking the even harder questions: have the dreams of black Americans yet been articulated concretely? How can the existing values of the community be sustained, either in the face of economic hardship or, in his later plays, as members of their community move into a more materially comfortable way of life? Never an ideologue, and certainly not intent on challenging the social and economic forms American life has taken, Bullins still queries how its realities, as perceived by black Americans, can sustain crucial human desires and the needs for love, security, and freedom.

When Bullins edited *Drama Review's* black theater issue, he divided the plays into two groups: "Black Revolutionary Theatre," under which heading he placed plays depicting racial conflict, often literal racial warfare, and "Theatre of Black Experience," in which he included plays depicting the battle raging within their characters' consciousness. This formal division of the plays written by Black American dramatist led to the evolution of two schools of writing:
The Black Revolutionary group with Baraka as the outstanding member, and the Black Experience group led by Bullins. Whereas Baraka was still trying to do something with whites, either flagellating them verbally, or parading them as beasts, the Black Experience writers like Bullins cared nothing for whites and concentrated on Black only. Most of his plays were about black people who had been crushed by the system, turned into gross distortion of what they could and should be, because they were denied knowledge of themselves and a space to grow. He didn’t deal with white society and culture because he despised what it had done and still attempted to do with the Black Americans.

To Bullins, Black Theatre would be a medium for communication to raise the consciousness throughout the nation for Black artistic, political, and cultural development. In an interview he said:

When you have a Black theatre you have a Black audience and Black artist, then the idea of getting people back together will be passed. The people will be together and all you will have to do while they are together will be to tell them things which are beneficial and progressive and revolutionary.

The power of Bullins’ plays lies in his elevating, apparently ruined lives, drug addicts, Loafers, and criminals, without romanticizing them. In this connection, W.D.E. Andrews, a famous critic of Bullins’ plays comments:

What we find in his drama is that the conventional white theatre form has been startlingly revitalised in the courage of its interaction with an Afro-American cultural tradition. Naturalism is charged with tacit black sensibility that seeks to celebrate and give
full expression to the unique styles of life, rhythms, images, and idioms of contemporary black America.

Early Plays

The early plays of Bullins depict absurd treatments of human situations; satire, leveled at those who indulge in empty political rhetoric; certain realistic mode of writing depicting Black street people and tenement dwellers; brutal life experiences of Black Americans; expression of pain and anger and many other things.

More specifically, a thorough study of the plays of Bullins reveals that he is profoundly inspired by the Black Arts Movement. He has dramatized the social, political, cultural, mythological and psychological aspects of Black Americans in a witty and effective manner. His first play, *How Do You Do?* is a stereotypical bourgeois greeting that becomes a rhythmic refrain. Paul, an image maker, ponders Roger and Dora stereotype as they transform through several cliché Black roles—'refined intellectuals', conspicuous consumers, sex object for whites, lust-filled never-do-wells, integrationist liberals. Having seen these roles, Paul begins rite 'How do you do?'. The play is subtitled "a Nonsense Drama". Le Roi Jones introduces the characters saying "All their faces turned into the lights and you work on them Black nigger magic and cleanse them at having seen the ugliness and if the beautiful see themselves, they will love themselves."

Bullins instructs that there must be music throughout the play; rhythmic music of a blues harmonica or guitar. A long, black, rough bench is at front stage,
a lone, blinking spot focuses upon the bench. The two male players are young, but nearly out of their youth. Roger is shabbily dressed; Paul's clothes do not matter. The look and import of taste must be apparent in Dora's dress and mannerisms, except when she becomes excited.

When the play starts, Paul sits on one end of the bench. A type of song named Georgia chair-gang song is sung and the light is steady in the stage. Paul says that he has not done anything for long. So he must make music that day. Then Dora arrives and enquires about what Paul does and why he talks to himself. But at the next moment Roger arrives and greets Dora. Paul sits silently, and they talk to each other. Dora says that she is the president of three clubs and she has a color T.V. then she gives a list of her aristocratic manners to him. When Roger enquires about Paul, Dora replies that he is "some old nigger. Dirty, no count Southern boogie, probably". (P 599). Then Roger calls him and wants to know why he is there when he is not of their class and quality. Paul replies that he is "an image maker". Dora says that see is a debutante and is in the society pages of "The Coloured Courier" every day. When Roger claims that he lives well and drinks well, Dora says that she has white lovers. Again and again Roger and Dora claim themselves to be superior. They scold Paul giving purely Black peoples' views. But Paul declares that he does not have any language, and he does not have any right. Hearing this statement of Paul, both Roger and Dora seem to develop their consciousness. Roger says that he is satisfied with his present position because he knows that he can't go further. He also tells that he left his school study as he found no value in it. Dora, then says that when she got birth, she had lost her parents. She just managed to pass school. Then she fell in love
and became pregnant. Finally Paul is able to convince them about the black man's hopeless position in America and gets satisfied with their response. Then he decides to compose the song with a note of "How do you do?", an ironical title asking the Black American about their position in the white dominated America. It expresses one of the major features of the Black Arts Movement since it speaks of Black consciousness.

Bullins' next short play, *Dialect Determinism* is a pointed satire, leveled at those who indulge themselves in empty political rhetoric. It depicts a rally during which the leader, Boss Brother, whips his audience into a frenzy, claiming to be a series of messiahs and glorying in the kind of illogic to which rhetoric without substance easily drifts. When the ghost of Malcolm X, the writer-cum-Black political leader rises to confront him, it is brutally attacked and ejected from the meeting, but immediately afterwards, the crowd, requiring a martyr, turns on Boss Brother with equal ferocity.

*Dialect Determinism* signals Bullins' vehement antipathy to any rhetoric, particularly political rhetoric, and becomes a self-indulgent substitute for action and conceals an unwillingness to effect meaningful personal or social change. With this play, Bullins first exhibits his willingness to take on those figures within the Black movement who exploit or use its rhetoric thoughtlessly. Among the Black playwrights of the movement, a movement whose shrill rhetoric he himself employed on occasion, Bullins stands alone as a critic of its excesses. That this aspect of his work received so little attention is a tribute both to his artistic quality and to the movement's essential health.
Clara’s Ole Man was first performed at the Firehouse Repertory Theatre in San Francisco on August 5th, 1965. The play is written in a realistic mode and it depicts the street people and tenement dwellers in effective manners. The play presents three women characters: Clara, “a light brown girl of eighteen, well built with long, dark hair”; Big Girl, “a stocky woman... of indeterminable age”, and Baby Girl, “Big girl’s mentally retarded teen age sister” and a major male character, Jack who is “20 years old, wears a corduroy Ivy league suit and vest”, who has come to Clara at her invitation.

The play is set in “A slum kitchen on a rainy afternoon in south Philadelphia... where Jack and Big Girl are “seated at opposite ends of the table”; Clara “stands, at the stove fanning the fumes toward the door,” Baby Girl “plays upon the floor with a homemade toy.” (P.252).

Clara, in the beginning, complains that Big Girl has not gone “to work this morning” (253). Big girl replies that she has certain “master plan” for which she has not gone to work. She requests Jack, who sits beside her, to go on drinking as that is an off day in her and she wants to celebrate it.

At that time Baby Girl starts shouting some nasty words which Clara dislikes. She remarks that Big Girl should teach her sister polite manners to which Jack adds that. She should provide proper guidance to her mentally retarded sister. Big Girl says that she is rightly careful about this because she works at the state nut farm as a technician. She knows how the doctors treat the mentally retarded kids and older people there wrongly. They put them insulin in order to quiet them down. As a result, these patients come back or suffer psychiatric disorder
again. So she tries to provide her sister “freedom.” She tries to make her feel “her spirit” so that gradually she must recover.

Big Girl then narrates her past life before Jack. She says that when she was a kid, her mother suffered from TB and, therefore both the sisters shipped out” somewhere. So both of them had to spend very miserable life with “Christians” for twelve years. So both of them were quite neglected in their childhood days. Even Clara who is with them now, has not been taken care of properly during her childhood. Even Clara gave birth to a child who died of the same disease that Baby girl had.

Just at that time, Clara returns with Miss Famie, “a thin middle aged Clara and Famie have come back after drinking gin and argue that they must drink. When Big Girl inquires Jack also tells how he has developed the habit of drinking. When they gossip, three other boys named Stoogie, Bama and Hoss “appear in yard doorway”. (P.267). These three boys are no more than sixteen years old and are hooligans of neighbourhood. They have already robbed an old man to escape police inquiry. However, they are quickly subdued by Big Girl.

When the three toughs come across Jack, they come to know that Jack lives “over in West Philly” and “was in the marines for three years” (P.275). He says that he has been to overseas and now he works in a post office. The next moment he discloses his actual purpose of visit: “Clara said for me to come by today in the afternoon... and I was wonderin’ what time he got home...” (P.280). This particular term “Ole Man” uttered by Jack makes Big girl upset: “she is controlled but furious “(P.280). Then jack learns that Clara’s ‘Ole man’ is nobody other than Big Girl herself. Big Girl
then suddenly changes her mood and activities dramatically. She forcibly takes Clara to the show to which Jack has invited her. The feeble protest of Clara, "I only wanted to talk to somebody. I don't have anybody to talk to... It is not his fault," was meaningless before the domineering Big Girl who commanded "DO LIKE I SAY! DO LIKE I WANT YOU TO DO! (P 281). Finally at Big Girl's command, the neighbourhood toughs brutally punish Jack for his ignorance.

The play, in fact, shows not only the misery of the Black people in the particular environment they live in but also the crudity of their minds (as in the case of Big Girl). Their actions reveal that they themselves create the hopeless atmosphere for their own community. They are not ready to refine themselves. If at all they conscious, their consciousness does not reflect any future possibilities. As the case here, young men and women who are educated, suffer a great mental gap and complicity.

The characters in Clara's Ole Man, like those in many of his latter plays, emerge from brutal life experiences with tenacity and grace while their language is often crude. It eloquently expresses their pain and anger, as well as the humour that sustains them until he becomes drunk, Jack speaks more formally than the others. His educated vocabulary and inflection are ridiculed by the others as the mark of his ignorance as well as his innocence. Clara, the other innocent, has not yet developed Big Girl's crudity or her defenses; she, like many later Bullin's women yearns for love, security, and a gentle life. Baby Girl is emblematic of the deformity that threatens those who lack the inner strength to endure unmitigated hardship. It is clear that the home Big Girl has established for Clara and Baby Girl has only saved but has done nothing else. Thus their lives
Bullins regards his people unflinchingly, revealing their deformities as well as their beauty and strength.

The play's ironic subtitle, *A Play of Lost Innocence*, applies equally to all the characters. Jack's pretentious language is mocked and the street gang is in flight from the police. There is no sense in which race is made the focus of the play or in which the distortions of the psyche are traced to racial origins.

Though the play is set in a slum kitchen in South Philadelphia, the image which dominates the play is a nonspecific sense of human desolation, frustrated hopes, and the evanescent nature of available consolations. Baby girl is too evident a symbol of human potential for the play to generate any confidence in the individual or in the possibility of communal actions and values.

W.D.E. Andrews compares this play with Baraka's *Dutchman*. He says that "like Baraka's Clay in *Dutchman*, Jack beats the insignia of the white bourgeois establishment. He wears an Ivy League suit and speaks in a voice which is "modulated and too eloquent for the surroundings" (P. 181). Again he argues with an additional dimension of the play. He says that the term "Theatre of Menace is as applicable to Bullin's play as it is to Pinter's work. Bullin's chilling domestic scene, enacted in a basically naturalistic milieu, becomes increasingly claustrophobic. It is charged with the tension that springs from barely submerged violence. Jack is not even aware that Big girl is his antagonist until she finally reveals to him that she is Clara's Ole Man". The pronouncement sends Jack reeling in spasms of nausea.
Clara has sought escape from this perverse, brutal world in which Big Girl figures as the archetype of the domineering black woman. Physically huge and grotesque, Big Girl has usurped the traditional male role, including its sexual prerogatives. Clara has invited Jack to visit, hoping for some escape from her debilitating environment. But the assimilated black man who has weakened himself by cutting himself off from his people is unable to save her. The play is a portrayal of the lives of poor and under-privileged Blacks who have been stifled and wrapped by an oppressive American system, Yet Big Girl is still vital or brutal, as her language is vital. It contrasts sharply with the lifeless, abstract formulations of Jack's speech. It is he who demonstrates the bad effect of white culture most forcefully.

Andrews tries to focus the substance of our concern. He says, "Bullins dramatizes his dialectic of experience without pleas, pathos, apology, or call for a solution. This is why his play is so effective. There is no point of compromise. (from the black activist point of view). Thus Clara's Ole Man is no doubt a play of a purely separatist outlook. His focus is more exclusively on the details of black life, and his intended audience is black, not mixed.

L.C. Sanders focuses on its social implications too. He is of the opinion that:

the audience is in a position similar to Jack's in several ways. It is not among the insiders; like Jack, it must gradually discover the nature of Clara's relationship to Big girl. Until the revelation, the audience, like Jack, has gradually come to feel that the world depicted is within its understanding and become comfortable with
its bizarre or simply alien characters. Moments before the final revelation, Jack confesses that he grew up on this neighbourhood, although he escaped and has been away. Similarly, the audience just begins to feel a shared origin with the characters when the world of the play turns violently on Jack, shutting him out, and the audience with him. In this very experience of being punished for the physical and emotional trespass, they can understand a crucial aspect of the world of *Clara’s Ole Man*. Jack’s presence, and by extension, that of the audience, forces all the characters to perceive themselves anew; Jack’s beating is a reflection of their subsequent painful reassertion of themselves. The audience must respect Big Girl and her world at the end of the play; the members of this world ask for no pity, and none is possible.

Bullins creates continuing characters such as Steve Benson, Cliff Dawson, Art Garrison and Michael Brown in the *20th Century Cycle plays*. His works keep returning to a group of characters who live on or wander between the East and West coasts, and particularly between the cities of Philadelphia and Los Angeles in the late 1950’s and the 1960’s. Steve Benson is not only Protagonist of the novel, *The Reluctant Rapist* but also the central character in three of his plays, *It has no Choice, In New England Winter* and *The Duplex*. Through this character, *It has no Choice*, Bullins portrays the evolving Black consciousness in America. Steve Benson is here motivated by an intense love-hate relationship with his concept of himself and his concept of whiteness. Bullins’ one act play written in 1966, is concerned with the relationship between Steve and Grace (a character possibly
named after Walker's wife in *The Slave*). In the play, Steve has wooed and bedded Grace, the white secretary of the company where he works. At the end of a sexually-satisfying two weeks' holiday Grace wants to break off their relationship:

Grace. You first stand around quiet and look out from behind these eyes all the times. Never saying too much Always treating me like I'm something special when I know what you can do with your mind what are you waiting for? When the manager is around your face is blank... You have nothing to say but when we be alone you treat me like a pet you're pampering animal you're flattering up... for what Steve?

In contempt of Grace's strong arguments to separate her from Steve, he says:

You entered into a contract... and you are going to keep it...

There's things you don't understand, Grace Man is the decider in his life. Man is the creator of his situation, he himself, is this... My role, the role that I've made for myself, include you... We're inseparable.... The dream of myself, he himself, is this... My role, the role that I've made for myself, include you... We're inseparable.... The dream of myself is n't complete isn't complete without you, darling (P 52).

The reason why Steve keeps her is revenge, a desire to dominate that which he perceives as having rejected him and his race. To Steve, the world is patently the white world in its most mysterious and inaccessible form... the white woman. He seems himself only as the possessor of Grace who defines his
Black manhood. He can't break off their relationship. So he strangles her into submission as a means of continuing their relationship until she admits, "I think I'll enjoy making love you tomorrow, darling" (55). The same thing happens in Baraka's *Dutchman*. Clay, the protagonist, wants to continue the relationship with the white lady, Lula. But the moment his manhood is questioned and insulted, he breaks the relationship. Grace wants to go back to her real white self but is prevented. Clay asserts his Black self after a point and is killed. For Bullins the image of the Black Man apparently in control of a white woman, while gratifying a fantasy of historical and symbolic significance is bitterly ironic.

*Goin' a Buffalo* (1968) is the first full-length play of Bullins. The play is about some Black people: Curt, Pandora, Art, Rich and Shaky, though Mamma Too Tight and Deeny are white. The rest of the characters are inter-racial. The action of the play takes place in Curt's apartment and at the strip club. The play depicts a community of street people whose hopes are brutally shattered when they introduce into their midst a treacherous outsider, Art Garrison. Curt and his wife Pandora, Mamma Too Tight, and her pimp, Shaky plan to leave Los Angeles to start afresh in Buffalo. At Curt's invitation, Art, whom Curt met in prison and who saved his life there during a riot, joins them. Although the others are initially wary of Art, he gradually wins the women and fends off Rich's continued distrust.

The exposition of the play reveals that Curt and Pandora are having bad financial condition. Curt expresses his desire to "make some money" by going to Buffalo and he wants to do it by his "wits", Pandora also agrees with Curt and hopes that they can stand on their own feet soon. But when Art joins them in
their discussion, Pandora seems to dislike his compliments. Even she does not like the presence of Mamma there. But her sarcastic remarks towards Art upsets her husband and he slaps her. But when he chases her to beat her more, he is obstructed by Art. Art wants all of them to “sit down and relax”. He then tries to pacify the situation by telling his past experiences: “And I could still sell some when my money got low and come out beautiful. I was really feeling good about the grass, Curt.”

After being beaten up by her husband, Pandora becomes gradually cool and develops interest in listening to Art. She then requests Art to look into her eyes and feel her confidence to stand by him. She says that although she is Pandora, she does not bear the so-called evil elements of Pandora’s Box as told in the mythology. She says that it is the evil mind of people that makes them find bad things on others. He calls these evil-minded people as “The Sick” or “The queers”, those “who buy sex from a woman”, “prayin’ for another for another person’s body” (P 43). When Mamma tries to look down upon Pandora, she reacts saying, “Nothin’ bad comes out of me or from my box, baby. Nothin’ bad, You can believe that. It’s all in what you bring to us” (P 44). Then Curt informs that Pandora has to dance at the Strip club as her boss Deeny has instructed. When they are ready to depart, the telephone rings and it is Deeny’s call. Deeny wants Pandora to reach the club immediately. So they finally leave for the Strip Club, “a cheap right club in the Wilshire area of Los Angeles” (P 48).

In the beginning of Act II, it is known that Deeny is in trouble because of some problem with the union. In the evening, at the direction of Deeny, they adjourn the club where Pandora dances, so that she and Mamma can go to work.
But Deeny refuses to pay her money. So a brawl develops at the club, and during the fight, Curt severely injures Deeny. When the police arrive, most of the main characters flee. They are forced to abandon Shaky who is too hurt to move. A known peddler carrying a large amount of heroin, Shaky is arrested.

Three days later, Curt gathers money to leave the town before Deeny either dies or returns to consciousness and presses charges. He and Rich plan to sell the rest of Shaky's heroin, use the money to free him on bail, and then with Art and the women, leave for Buffalo. Thus Curt and Rich exit to make the sale, bringing Pandora as driver; they leave Art to care for Mamma and prevent her from taking a fix. As the scene ends, Art makes a phone call then comforts Mamma with drugs and sex.

The final scene is brief. Pandora returns distraught: the police, who were waiting for them, have arrested Curt and Rich with the drugs in their possession. Pandora wants Art to use the money they have saved to free the men on bail, but Art, forcing her to pack, intends to bring her and Mamma Too-Tight to Buffalo. Art's treachery is possible only because the characters refuse to admit the truth about themselves and their world.

The geographical objective of the Black characters in the play suggests the fruitlessness of their quest for a better life. Mamma is a heroin addict and despite the legitimacy of their union, Curt and Pandora deny that their relationship mirrors Shaky and Mamma's more blatant one, thus challenging the very basis of their marriage. Curt identifies Art as rebel: But it becomes an irony. When Curt seriously injures Pandora's boss in a fight, and other men attempt a drug sale for getaway money, Art coolly turns them in and takes possession of the women.
Bullins, uses lighting to concretize this crucial theme of personal and communal illusion. In Act I, “Within the interior of the front room the light is a mixture of red, blues, and violet, with crimson shadow bordering the edges of the stage to create the illusion of a world afire, with this pocket of atmosphere an oasis (P4). The seeming safety of the oasis blinds them not only to the danger embodied in Art but also to the implications of the frequent outbursts of violence that mark their own interactions. Within the opening minutes, for example, Curt is testy with Rich while beating him at chess, and almost strikes Pandora because she grumbles about serving them beer. Shortly after, a flippant remark by Art about his ability to handle a gun brings the atmosphere to the breaking point again. This rhythm of violence governs the entire play.

In Act 2, lighting is used to accentuate the night club setting, making it garish and sensuous like the women who work there. The stage directions insist “A rotating color-wheel, infront of the major lights, should turn constantly through out this scene, giving an entire spectrum of altering colored shadows. Additional colored lights and spots be used to stress mood changed and the violence of the ending scene.” (P48). In this act, Bullins intermittently frees the background activity in the club, frequently at the point of violence, spotlights and interchanges between his principal characters. Finally, the menace that has remained in the background erupts, and during the fight one feels that Curt, Art, and Pandora finally express the violence they barely held in check in the previous act.

Act III returns again to Curt’s apartment, which, in the first scene of the act, appears “sterile, unlived in and motel-like”, lit only by the harsh “California
sunshine” (82). The stark lighting suggests the characters’ feelings of vulnerability. Curt feels vulnerable because he fears Deeny may die; Mamma, because she is suffering from heroin withdrawal and misses Shaky; Rich, because he is increasingly suspicious of Art. The illusion of safety created by the lighting in Act. One has been disrupted, but the harsh glare in this scene is no more revealing. The audience cannot hear Art’s treacherous phone call, and he comforts Mamma with sex and drugs in the dark. By the time Pandora returns in the final scene, Art has recreated the original lighting, visually restoring the opening illusion. The effect is simply to reaffirm and reveal its real function—that of a bitter trap of revelation experienced only by the audience since Art already knows it, the other men are all in jail, Mamma is high of drugs, and Pandora is too stunned to understand.

A related motif in Goin’ a Buffalo is the game of chess. Only Curt and Rich play, and Curt always wins. One senses that they have been playing for years and that through the game Curt dominates his lifelong buddy. In chess, a good player can see every move coming. Weak players do not think far enough ahead, and they allow themselves to become distracted. In the first scene, Curt and Rich have forgotten whose turn it is, and they ask Art if he has noticed. “I ain’t in it,” he demurs (16). But he watches the game, and although he claims not to have played it a long time, he is obviously good. Not only is Art a better player, but also he does not share the fantasies with which the others delude and protect themselves. The most dangerous fantasy is Curt’s. He tells Art: “You’re like me in a lot of ways. Man, we’re a new breed, ya know. Renegades. Rebels. There’s no rules for us... we make them as we break them.” Art remarks, “Sounds kind a
romantic, Curt”. Curt responds: “And why shouldn't it? Man, this ain't a world we built so why should we try to fit in it? We have to make it over the best way we can ... and we are the ones to do it. We are, man, we are!” (68 - 69)

Curt’s romanticism is one from which Bullins is not completely immune. It also comments ironically on Theater of Black Experience that would seek to endow street life and street people with mythical proportions. *Goin'a Buffalo* explores the deadly nature of that world and finds little redeeming features in it. For if there is a rule in the world of the renegade, as Curt admits, it is that all rules can be broken, and particularly vulnerable are those affecting human bonds of trust and affection. Thus, for example, Curt’s rebel attitude challenges his own commitment to Art as his “Little brother,” an implication Curt misses but that Art does not.

*Goin’a Buffalo* strikes at a favourite theme of Bullins; that is, treachery inside the Black community, a treachery that leaves it open to destruction from outside. In prison, Art saves Curt from a white man in a fight that developed from strife between Muslim and non-Muslim black prisoners. The prison violence mirrors the constant undercurrent of violence in the outside world. Art manipulates that violence to his own ends; for example, both Pandora and Mamma are accustomed to physical brutality from Curt and Shaky and thus vulnerable to Arts’ apparent gentleness.

The play focuses on the intense, vital black men and women who misuse, repress, and abuse their strength and creativity, and live in constant danger from themselves and one another. However, the white world is present in *Goin’a Buffalo*, in a fashion possibly unique in the corpus of the Black theater. Though
Mamma-Too-Tight is white, she seems completely accepted and a part of the black world of the play from the very moment she appears. Her presence certainly suggests that the social and personal ills depicted in *Goin'a Buffalo* are not unique to black people; in fact, Mamma is far more deeply enmeshed in street life than Pandora, for she is openly a prostitute, and an addict as well as complication. Pandora has avoided Mamma on the streets to stay, while Curt and Pandora hope to leave.

Some references are made to Mamma's color, and aspects which of her portrait suggest stereotyping Mamma's original name, that is "Queenie Bell Mack. Her name is intended to contrast Pandora's ample box-evoking epithets often used in black literature to refer to white women. She provides the only source of humour in the play, which suggests a reversal of the stereotypical role of the black comic in white drama. In Bullins' use of Mamma-Too-Tight, the process of demetaphorizing the black characters and metaphorizing the white, is perfectly realized.

Mamma's white colour reminds the audience that the world depicted is black in which Mamma fits in because she has learned to "talk like a spade." Pandora reminds her, "When you brought your funky ass from Mississippi... we couldn't even understand you... we taught you how to speak, if anything!"(69). Her reminder is eloquent. If her black friends gave Mamma language, it was to voice a pain that was in her already and that she could not express in Biloxi, Mississippi. The language provided to her is not only the spoken black dialect but also the cool jazz that forms a constant background to the action.
In *Goin’ a Buffalo*, Bullins accentuates all that is perverse about the hustling street world. The world of the renegade is not one of infinite possibility, as Curt wants to believe. Because it recognizes no rules; in it no community, no love, no trust, and thus no real future is possible. Commenting on the play, Prof. Sequeira says:

Negroes are keen on killing by selling pot that has come into their procession. They are involved in a variety of petty crimes and are responsible for wrecking the strip club where some of them worked at one time. The fact that they represent a combination of the Bohemia, the delinquent and the Negro, comes through clearly in the play."

This shows, as he says, "the relationship of the Black, as of other ethnic groups is complex and multidimensional. In art which is not wholly propaganda, images of Black culture softly and creatively worked into the larger fabric of cultural pluralism based on the American idea."

It seems as if ruthlessness and ingenuity were the only way for their dream fulfillment.

*A Son, Come Home* was first produced at the American Place Theatre on March 26, 1968. It has only four characters. They are Mother, in her early 50's, a 30 years old son, the Girl and the Boy. It is a brief, delicate sketch performed on a bare stage that relates the history of a Black family through an encounter between a fanatically religious Mother and her estranged Son. But the Mother and Son are shadowed by the Boy and the Girl (dancers) who enact some of their memories and extend comment on or speak their broken dialogues.
As the play begins we find the Boy and the Girl "wear black tights and shirts. They move the action of the play and express the Mother's and the Son's moods and tensions: they become various embodiments recalled from memory and history: they enact a number of personalities and move from mood to mood." When the conversation between Mother and Son proceeds, we come to know that after an absence of nine years, Michael has come home to visit her mother, who has become a religious fanatic and lives in a tyrannical church-run home. Their conversation, desultory and at cross-purposes, evokes painful memories in both. Thus when the son tries to get more of access towards his Mother. She acts as if she is no longer interested to do so. It leads to the formation of a sense of alienation in the son. Thus the son says, "This town seems so strange. Different than how I remember it (P 189). Again he says "Yes, home... an anachronism." (P 189). Again and again, both of them recollect their memory of life before nine years and Mother says that they” lived on Derby Street” (P 191).

The mood of *A Son, Come Home* is almost unbearably sad. Each potentially joyous moment in their encounter turns out to be sorrowful or is juxtaposed to an expression of fear, disappointment or difficulty. The dominant theme of the play is the family bond; the mother repeatedly admonishes Michael to contact his aunt Sophie, at Los Angeles, rebuking him for losing touch with her and telling him that they are also alike. Michael’s memories are not expressed to his mother. Then it is revealed that his aunt threw him out of her house after a week’s visit and later refused a simple request for help when he was in trouble.
Through Michael's questions the audience learns that his mother loved and lived with a man named Will for ten years a man who never married her because, she finally admits to Michael, he had a family elsewhere. Michael claims "Will was like father to me ... the only one I have really known" (207). His mother then reminds him that he drove Will out of the house as soon as he was big enough: "As soon as you were big enough you did all that you could to get me and Will separated" (P. 208). The rhythm of each exchange is the same: the hope, joy or excitement experienced by him is denied, refuted or negated by the response of the memories of his mother. Twice Michael proposes an evening out with his mother, and twice she refuses saying that she never "eats out" anymore. Religion has become both a solace for her painful memories and a prison protecting her from further encountering the world. Neither do the mother and son becomes any closer to each other through the visit nor neither seems to have gained any satisfaction from it. Michael's rejection of the idea of home at the play's beginning is balanced by the mother's withdrawal from Michael at the close of the visit and their mutual rejections protecting them from each other:

Mother. Well you are a man now, Michael... I can no longer live it for you. Do the best with what you have.

Son. Yes... Yes, I will, Mother.

Mother. Well, you're a man now, Michael... I can no longer live it for you. Do the best with what you have.
Son. Well, I Guess I better be going, Mother.

Mother. Take care of yourself, son.

Son. Yes, Mother. I will (PP 211-212)

Finally, the Mother retreats into her religious environment and the son returns to his lonely life. Bullins keeps the beautiful all but invisible, although there is beautiful dignity buried far below the religious Mother’s orthodoxy in the play.

Bullins’ play, *The Gentleman Caller*, produced in 1969, portrays a young middle class Blackman who seeks identity with the establishment in American society and is destroyed by the maid-turned militant along with a White couple. Bullins had earlier satirized the Black people for blind imitation of middle class life styles and values in a ritualistic piece *How Do You Do?* (1965) and had made seething condemnations of the would be Black intellectuals in *The Electronic Nigger* (1968) and of the middle classes in *Clara’s Ole Man* (1965). But *The Gentleman Caller* marks the climax of Bullins’ revolutionary plays and is an improvement over *Death List*. It not only satirizes the Black middle class’s attempt to imitate Whites but also points to the inevitability of destroying the White man’s dominance. Bullins often exposes the expectations of middle class Black Americans and challenges their values and behaviour. His plays vividly project the danger and duplicity in the lives of the Black people who emulate typical middle class customs and values.

*The Gentleman Caller* has four characters who can be considered to be symbolic representations of different aspects of American life. Madame with a painted silver face, wearing a large pearl necklace and a Blonde wig, represents
the “American bitch-goddess.” Mr. Mann, the lady’s husband, is painted gold and metaphorically stands for the American dream of success. Mamie, the Maid, represents the Black masses who, though ostensibly servile to their white masters, are filled with hate for them. The Gentleman, a well-dressed young man wearing dark glasses, hiding his true identity is a mute Clay, the Black middle class intellectual who seeks to identify with the establishment.

*The Gentleman Caller* is a satirical fantasy which bears a certain resemblance to Baraka’s *Dutchman*. In the interest of the revolution the gentleman caller must be destroyed by the Maid, the Queen Mother. The action takes place against a satiric backdrop, “a comfortable furnished living room in a fashionable section of a northern American city... Against the backwall is a gun rack with rifles and shot-guns in it. Upon the wall are mounted and stuffed heads of a Blackman, an American Indian, a Vietnamese and a Chinese”.14

A young Black man calls on the decadent rich white lady and is ushered in by the Black maid. The Madame comes and babbles endlessly about her traditions, her family, her loyalty, and her “ecclesiastical rank.” The gentleman sits with his legs crossed smoking imported cigarattes but never speaks. The White lady talks about herself, her husband Mr. Mann, who is in the bathroom shaving, and her maid, “one of the truly worthwhile possessions (her) father left (them) with” (P. 372).

Mrs. Mann is a White-bitch figure like Sharon Strover in *The Pig Pen*. These two female characters share similarities with Lula in *Dutchman*. In fact, Mrs. Mann is a more mature, more decadent Lula, with her wild singing, her hysterical laughter and her groovy seductive dance. She is the ultra feminine doll who hates
her emasculated mate, tempts the gentleman caller, as the super-sexual menial --
a situation similar to the relationship between the Christ figure and White ladies
in Baraka's *The Baptism*. Following the exit of the Maid after announcing her
decision to quit, the Madame" appears relieved" and "relaxed."

(Madame paces about the room, mutters, looking off where the
Maid disappeared. Then, stops and abruptly turns to the Gentleman
and pulls open her dressing gown, revealing she has nothing
beneath the gown save Madame)

Like this ?

(Expressionless, the Gentleman looks at her. Madame begins a slow,
unfamiliar to her, dance.) Like this, boy ? ... Huh ? You want this,
boy ? You want some of this ? Or should I say, Sir ? (Mocking)

Sir ... now how does that sound ? Sir ? Boy Sir ? Sir Boy ? Now do
you want people to be going around saying "Sir, this .. Sir, that 
Huh ? Do you ? How about if I said, "Sir, come and get some of this ...
come get your goodies". How would you like that ? (376-77)

The condescending behaviour of the Madame in the presence of the
Gentleman Caller is reflective of the attitude of White liberals toward Blacks. Her
speech emphasizes the racial barriers that divide the Blacks and Whites and the
racial superiority of the Whites. The Maid also expresses her contempt for and
hostility toward middle class Blacks at the first sight itself : "What you messin'
it me fo; boy ? .. Always somethin' else ta mess with you! ... I jest can't
understand you's young'uns none" (371). The Madame is really shocked to see
how the Gentleman behaves. This is not in accordance with the expected servile behaviour of Black in the presence of a white person. She says:

I find you sitting with your legs crossed in my home! Blowing smoke from those terrible imported cigarettes all over my curtains and drapes! (Frets)

Ohhh ... now what do you have to say for yourself and how you treat me! ... No respect in my own home, Come, you, now tell me. What do you have to say for yourself? (372)

But the White Lady is ready to bear with this kind of pretensions because she knows that times have really changed. The Gentleman is a middle class Negro who has failed to find his true Black identity in his quest for success in the predominantly White American society, little realizing that the “Whitey” has nothing worthwhile to offer to the Blacks. Having adopted the values and attitudes of the Whites he invites death for himself from the Black masses.

The Gentleman Caller is an improvement over Bullins’ early plays in that the Black maid here representing Black masses is now a revolutionary who destroys the forces responsible for the sufferings of Blacks. The Madame describes the maid in such endearing terms as “a living doll,” “simply divine,” “so innocent,” and “so child like and naive”. The White lady endows the maid with all the characteristics that make Black men / women inferior to Whites - humility, self-effacing petience, devotion, loyalty and gratitude. She even tells the Gentleman: “You can be proud you sprang from her loins. You can be thankful for having the very salt of the earth, the very blood and marrow of the universe ... ” (380). The White lady’s frequent reference to her dependence on the Maid is
reflective of White America's dependence on Blacks for its material success. The dialogue between the Madame and the Maid will illustrate this:

Madame. But what about all these years you’ve spent with me?

With us?

Maid. I dunno, ma'am.

Madame. What about my suckling your big flabby breasts?

Madame. .... and you raised me as one of your own?

Maid. Dat's cause I's never had time of mah own, ma'am (376)

Bullins here reveals the historical truth about many white children who, left to the care of Black nurses, were suckled by them in the absence of their mothers. It shows how deeply indebted the Whites are to the Black race. Bullins anti-White rage has the same intensity of Baraka.

In the end, the Maid announces her decision to quit, putting an end to all kinds of racial exploitation. Transformed into a real revolutionary, she kills Mr. Mann and the Madame, and shoots the Black intellectual for having preferred his "books to guerilla welfare." This destruction in the interest of the revolution is pictured as inevitable by Bullins in the play. Baraka has also done the same in The Slave. But the idea suggested in The Gentleman Caller is an improvement upon what was suggested in The Slave and Death List. The Gentleman Caller argues that Black masses should not fight among themselves, but should fight unitedly against the white oppressor. The destruction of the oppressor is posited as the duty not of an individual, but of a race, of every African American. This is evident in the final speech of the Maid. After the killing, the Maid is cleaned and
The long African garb that she wears now is symbolic of this. In the black gown, she answers the telephone with a revolutionary speech:

Yes, father... the time is now. It is the time for Black people to come together. It is time for Black people to rise from their knees and come together in unity, brotherhood and Black spirituality to form a nation that will rise from our enslaved mass and meet the oppressor... meet the devil and conquer and destroy him.

... ... ...

yes, we are rising, father... we are forming the foretold Black nation that will survive, conquer and rule under your divine guidance. We black people are preparing for the future. We are getting ready for the long war ahead of us. DEATH TO THE ENEMIES OF THE BLACK PEOPLE!

All praises is due to the Blackman. (P 380)

Murder, whether in the family or out of it, is a recurring theme in several of Bullins' plays. Killing is made rarely for the sake of killing. The murder is usually committed in the name of revolution, in which case the white person or Uncle Tom is killed because he has become an obstacle to the revolution.

In *The Gentleman Caller*, the recurring theme of murder is closely tied up with the theme of personal transformation (transformation from servility to racial / revolutionary consciousness). The play begins with the Black maid identifying closely with the White man's world view and the values that he cherishes. However, in the course of the play, something happens which causes the view to
crumble in the character's eyes. The Black female character is forced at crucial moments to see things as they really are, to feel the depth of humiliation, and to finally rise with the recognition that revolution and resistance are the only way out.

Murder in most Black revolutionary plays has an affirmative effect. The murder of Mrs. Mann by the Black maid in *The Gentleman Caller* affirms the maid's Blackness and consummates her transition from a footshifting house nigger to a proud Black woman. The use of murder in this way corresponds to violence by the oppressed as redemptive and self-affirming. Baraka does not attempt to understand the "colour" problem in order to solve it through a psycho analytic sleight-of-hand that Bullins does; rather his exposition of the situation of blacks in American culture is geared to an ultimate destruction of that culture.

*The Corner* is a one-act-play which was first produced in 1968. It offers a close view of Cliff Dawson, one of the stock protagonists of Bullins' plays. Set in a street in Los Angels, it sketches young ghetto Blacks flirting with Cliff's girl, Stella. They are also found whiling away their time in drinking, stealing, fornicating, gossiping and taunting one another with sharp wit while gossiping, slick tells oddly to Stella that Cliff buys a bottle of wine for her only to drink with him before he takes her for physical enjoyment. Cliff's rough treatment of Stella is clear from Slick's mocking remarks to Stella: "How many times you've spent in the back seat of Silly Willy's broke-down Buik that don't run no mo'... *spends it on you*... you weak-minded bitch! How many times you been on me couch... in my front room... with him?..." Though these remarks infuriates Stella she has no other way out. But when Slick ask her, "you better stop flirtin' wit'..."
the fell as, Stella”, she gives a sharp reply, “You mind your business man. Everybody knows I’m Cliff’s girl.” (PP 113-114).

Then it is found that Cliff their acknowledged leader comes and joins Stella in drinking and tells her to go to sit in “Silly Willy’s car” in order to fulfil his sexual desire with her. But Stella disapproves of the proposal of going to that particular car and requests Cliff to take her to a motel... just once.” Cliff turns down the request on the plea, “I ain’t got no money to be wastin’ on that foolishness, woman!” (P 118). When Stella argues that Cliff has kept money which he gets turn his other girl, Lou, Cliff is engaged and asks her to keep her mouth shut. But Stella strongly protests:

Nawh, I ain’t gonna keep mah mouf shut! I ain’t no whore, Cliff. I’m a woman... I want to be your woman. I don’t care none about Lou or Sue or Annie or any of the rest of your funky bitches... just as long as you treat me right.... I do anything for you... you know that. I do almost anything ’cept get out on these streets for you (P 119)

But Stella’s protest becomes meaningless as Cliff lends a deaf ear to her words and forcibly takes her to the same car and rapes her. So still then Stella responds to him in a positive way saying that “I’m yours, baby... but don’t treat me so bad. Just don’t treat me so bad” (P 120). In spite of Stella’s sincerity and love towards him, Cliff quite careless to the sensitive words of a woman treats her roughly, scolds her and suggests his companions, Bummie, Slick, Blue and Silly, to enjoy her in the same can and offers them the key of the can. Thus the protest of Stella, “I ain’t no whore (P 119), becomes ironical and Stella falls a victim to their
animal desire. Cliff also confesses to Bummie that he has impregnated Lou. Thus Cliff is presented as an immoral character who has no regard for women and family-ties. He takes women as objects of their sexual fulfillment.

The play, thus, focuses on brutal human relationship that exists among the lower class Blacks. Their feelings are scarcely articulated by individuals for whom money, wine, and sex are the dominant realities. Cliff Dawson betrays the girl who loves him sincerely and forces her to become a street whore. His decision to stay with Lou, the woman who pays him money regularly, is prompted by his mercenary motive and sense of insufficiency in his life. He wonders: "What is like me, huh? To be a bum? To drink wine and fuck bitches in junky cars? To stand half the night on some street corner that any fucken cop can come up and claim?" (P 125). But this sense of hollowness is imperfectly perceived, and marriage clearly offers no real meaning for him.

His next play, The Electronic Nigger, was first produced at the American Place Theater on March 26, 1968. The play has the following characters: Mr. Jones, "a light-brown-skinned man" of thirty; Mr. Carpenter, "a large, dark man in his late thirties". Bill, "a twenty two years old Negro"; Sue, "a twenty years old White"; Lenard, "a fat white boy of twenty one, Miss Mostokowitz, an "aging professional student" of mid-thirties and Martha, "an attractive Negro woman".

Mr. Jones is an instructor in a junior College. He is a young Black writer too. He gossips with his students about working out a proposal for study of a creative writing course. In the meantime a scholar of sociology named Mr. Carpentier arrives there and takes part in the discussion. Mr. Carpentier as well as
other students of Mr. Jones give various proposal for study but Mr. Jones rejects them.

When Mr. Carpentier gives his opinion that “The new technology doesn’t allow for the weak tyranny of human attitudes.... This is the age of the new intellectual assisted by his tool, the machine”, Mr. Jones furiously comments: “Carpentier.... That what we are here in this classroom to fight against... we are here to discover, to awaken, to search out human values through art!” (P 232). He adds that “The culture has values and the writer’s duties are to ...” (P 238) activate them through his creative writings. Then he strongly argues favour of Black Americans:

I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found”.... Mr. Carpentier... Let’s hope that we Black Americans can first find ourselves and perhaps be equal to the task... the burden some and sometimes evil task, by the way... that being an American call, for in these days. (P 239).

Mr. Carpentier is a scholar who “speaks in blustering orations, many times mispronouncing words. His tone is stentorian, and his voice has an absurdly ridiculous affected accent” (P 216). As soon as Carpentier enters classroom, he tries to dominate the entire scene. He uses the most complex language to draw the attention of others to himself and his achievements. When Mr. Jones puts emphasis on creative writings like writing “a story” in a class, Mr. Carpentier strongly opposes the idea. His concept of art “... is to scientifically eavesdrop... with electronic listening devices and get the actual evidence for any realistic fictionalizing one wishes to achieve... combined with the social psychologist case
study and the daily experiences of some habitual of a socio-economically depressed area, is the genius of the intellectual and artistic craftsmen. (PP 239-41)

His sheet bombast finally defeats. Jones, who is appalled by Carpentier's professional treachery, particularly because he is black:

Mr. Jones. Doesn't the writer have some type of obligation to remove some of the intellectual as well as political, moral and social tyranny that infects this culture? What does all the large words in creation serve you, my Black brother, if you are a complete white washed man?

Mr. Carpentier. Sir, I am not black nor your brother.... There is a school of thought that is diametrically opposed to you and your black chauvinism ... You preach bigotry, black nationalism and fascism. The idea... black brother... is intellectual barbarism! (239-40).

This outbreak finishes Jones. As Carpentier discourses to a rapt audience on adolescent necrophilia, observed by bugging corpses in his family's funeral home, Jones announces his early retirement from teaching and dismisses the class. Few notice, for they have succumbed to Carpentier, whose rhetoric finally evolves into a gibberish of abstract nouns.

Carpentier has immersed himself in sociological language to gain power, and Jones seeks his authority in Literature. Mr. Jones attempts to assert himself to the class by pleading, “I have read Faulkner in his entirety... I cut my teeth on
Hemingway ... *Leaves of Grass* is my Bible*. (P 243) Jones is doubly ineffectual in the sense that he represents the traditional arts and humanities in their encounter with the contemporary sociotechnical, pseudoscientific objectification of the world and is appropriately speechless before Carpentier’s onslaught. As representative of the young black intellectual, Jones reveals that type’s patent inability to deal with the clearly recognizable type evoked by Carpentier; the older, blustering black community leader, frequently a teacher of preacher, whose love of learning consists more in his relish for a complex vocabulary than that vocabulary embodies, and who, like the prototypical folk preacher, finds in language a source of power. The play drew on the raging debate about the nature of black art and the role of the black artist carried on outside the classroom theater in the 1960s in radically different language and form.

The play raises other artistic issues as well. The kind of art Carpentier advocates, “community eavesdropping” ironically reflects the realism of the playwrights of the black experience including Bullins’ Carpentier finds the “great themes” at “AA meetings, prisons” wherever he plants his bugs and intones them: Loneliness! Estrangement! Alienation! (P 230). The play delights in depicting the abuse both of the artist’s subject and of language his tool. Thus, in an oblique fashion. *The Electronic Nigger* raises issues that are central to Bullins’ serious plays the danger and even betrayal involved in seeing, understanding, and portraying the truth embedded in ordinary reality, the various failures in human communication, and the confusion of being black in white America. It is a more sustained satire of Black intellectuals and the title of it is therefore shocking and self-explanatory.
Twentieth Century Cycle Plays

In the Twentieth Century Cycle Plays, Bullins seems to be more serious about the social and psychological problems associated with the Black Americans. His depiction of Black experience is profound in these plays as they allude to race relations, focus upon a group of characters who are linked either by blood or childhood associations and whose development can only be noticed by the audience. These plays include characters of Black whores and bull-daggers. To some extent, the plays are ritualistic too.

Bullins' *In the Wine Time* (1968) is the first play included in the 20th Century Cycle. The play is mainly based on the three characters: Cliff Dawson, Lou Dawson, Cliff's wife, and Ray, who happens to be the nephew of Lou. Set in the Philadelphia ghetto, the play explores the meaning of manhood through its positive manifestation. The play begins with "The Prologue" in which Ray explains all this. In the form of a short story, it says about a semi-mythical woman with whom the young narrator is fascinated and who promises him fulfillment when he is ready. She and sixteen years old Ray's desire to join the navy are the topics of conversation in the beginning. In the play an evening of "talking, gossiping, playing checkers and cards, drinking sodas, wine and beer" continues on the front stoop of Cliff and Lou on the occasion of Ray's initiation into manhood. It is found that Cliff lives on his pregnant wife's earnings in one side and drinks and whores on the other. Thus Lou complains that Cliff "was loud and was always fightin' and drinkin'" (P139) to which Cliff reacts saying that "T'll be one and turn this fucken world of dreams and lies and fairy tales into a jungle.
or a desert" (P 139). Lou does not want that Cliff should be a model for Ray as she says, "The only thing that's wrong with Ray is you, Cliff, I know some of those nasty things you been tellin' him (P 160).

Cliff encourages Ray in his ambition to leave Derby street. He admonishes him that his love for this woman will prevent him from entering the world that is rightfully his, much in the same manner as his (Cliff's) love for Lou has kept him tied to Derby street. Lou wants Ray to wait and attack Cliff for his own failure to realize his ambitions. The fight is clearly a repetition of a constant theme in their marriage, and only in Lou's absence can Cliff admit to Ray how deeply he values his wife. Cliff and Lou shift rapidly from comic affection and heartfelt sentiments of devotion to each other, to despair and bitter wrangling over the limited horizons they see for themselves. In the background, other groups play out the same themes; particularly, the men of the neighbourhood assert themselves over the women with violence born not out of frustrated love, but simply out of a desire for mastery.

Finally all the characters gather at the Dawsons, and Red, the shallow and cruel neighbourhood boy who has just claimed Ray's old girl friend Bunny, offers a toast to Ray's new love, giving Ray urine to drink instead of wine. In the ensuing battle, hidden from view, Red is killed and Cliff, who has rushed to Ray's defense, emerges holding the knife taking the blame on him. Though Cliff's action here remains ambiguous, it suggests rather that cliff not only saves Ray from imprisonment, but also inspires him to pursue the freedom that has eluded him. action eloquently responds to Lou's earlier claim that Cliff is first to act as Ray's guardian. Saving Ray, thus, marks Cliff's maturation and provides a model
for Ray. Finally, *In the Wine Time*, the attainment of manhood depends upon a readiness to act, not only for oneself but on behalf of others. Cliff's action is the converse of Art's treachery in *Goin' a Buffalo*.

Much of the surface action of the play is drinking, squabbling, and cursing in Black street dialogue, that Bullins has made his own, of the Dawsons and their neighbours. Much of it is very funny, but real in the Black life. But beneath the surface, as it is true of all Bullins' plays, the undercurrent is very strong.

The play has a firm plot which deals with love, stability and responsibility among the members of a Black family. Lou wants to keep the boy Ray with her because she says, "He's all I got left, Cliff... He's all the family I got left" (P 181). Cliff is also determined to help him join the Navy, set him free and prevent him from becoming one of the local lay figures. He says to Ray: "You young-bloods own the future... I had my chance. All I can do now is sit back and raise fat babies. It's your world now, boy" (156). Cliff repeats the same words towards the end of the play owning responsibility for the murder Ray has committed, "It's your world, Ray... It's yours, boy... go on out there and claim it".(182).

Critics give a similar opinion on the play. *In the wine Time* meditates on the real meaning of these qualities, and displays through Cliff's sacrifice, the strength and dignity of the ordinary individual. Through this meditation Bullins conducts his search for heroes in the Black community.

For the polite inhabitants of the Avenue, for those whose ears are attuned only to gospel songs or the narcotic dance of the radio commercial, it is evidence of anarchy best shut out. For those on the street, it is simply conformation of the closed world of desire and death-a world which is not
explained as a consequence of race, but as the product of a life without transcending ideals which can be transformed into action. In a sense, the ideal girl, the mythical woman pursued by Ray, is away to restore a primal innocence, to charge the ordinary processes of life with meaning, to redeem and justify a life spent in a world whose reality is corrupting and whose principles have become lost in the simple process of survival. Bigsby comments that *In the Wine Time* is “a piece of solipsism which is potentially destructive.” He comments:

The momentary glimpses of potential harmony and of a future not hedged around by irony are shattered by the familiar rhythm of sex, drink, and violence. And nowhere in the play does Bullins identify an alternative to the destructive visions... unless it is in the desperate, unthinking opiate of sexual relationships, which at best parody that sense of communal values and purposive action which now became the central justification and function of his drama.

The Second major play of *the Twentieth Century Cycle* was *In New England Winter*(1967), a long one-act play consisting of a poetic prologue and seven scenes.

The playwright introduces the characters in two different years. The first group of characters belongs to 1960. They are Cliff, Steve, Chuckie and Bummie. Cliff is “large, husky, going to fat but still appealing to his many girl friends. A hint of a subdued swagger and worldliness remains” in him. Steve is “Cliff’s half brother, Darker than Cliff, brooding and a thinker”. Chuckie is a follower. He remains “quiet most of the time unless he is familiar with the situation.” He is “a
dull, not yet pathetic person who already suspects that he will discover death some night in the street or in a prison cell”. Bummie is “a fully but loyal” having “medium height and athletic build.

The other group of characters belongs to 1965, Liz, “a very dark girl, black, in fact, with fine features and oriental casted eyes... extremely sensual... She is free of many social restraints, hiding behind her profanity and her professed insanity. She draws men to her in numbers...” Oscar is Liz’s brothers in law. He is a “long shaggy haired criminal in vagabonds dress”. Carrie is “a thin girl who smiles often out of drunkenness” (P 130) She is Liz’s sister and Oscar’s wife. And finally, Crook is a watcher and and waiter” (P 130-131)

The plot centers around a single incident, the robbery of a finance company which is planned primarily by Steve, aided by his half-brother, Cliff, along with Bummie and Chuckie. The Prologue, spoken by Steve, tells of the successful execution of the robbery and of Steve’s love for Liz, a girl whom he knew in his New England winter, Steve’s love idyll from five years before, at first made attractive by her lyric telling, is gradually revealed as a desperate escape. He remembers how “We shrilled from the moments gratification under the guilt; it was our bond of permanence in the cold times” P (131 ). His memories fixate on how he and liz managed to create this small circle of warmth, intimacy, and love against the all enshrouding coldness round about. Steve’s memories of New England are wistful and tender, imbued with a child like innocence. Romantically and lovingly he recalls the still vivid, finely sensuous details. He poetically relieves the fragility of the idyll, the constant threat of the cold, white world, the desperation of the attempt to keep reality at bay. As he narrates in The Prologue:
Ice grows upon window panes in New England Winter. The dread of it entering our world caused her nightmares; but, I didn’t dare claim these, so I awoke her and soothed her chatters with the jar. And afterwards, we promised ourselves that somehow we would find a stop for haunting yesterdays and tomorrow which waited to be refused.

Our futures loomed bitter and less bearable than the snowdrifts blocking the alleys below; but our fears seared, raging about our souls, fanning combustion of brutality. As my manhood leaked away upon the wintry streets by day, she cemented together my backbone under the patched quilt through the long long icy nights... (PP. 132 - 33).

The lines breathe an insistent feeling of barely contained panic. Imagery of obsessive terror., impending dissolution, and suffocation is used to characterize these people’s lives. They are trapped in a present which breeds “nightmares” and “dread”; a past which “haunts” them with its frustrations and failures; and a sinister, spectral future that “looms” before them as an engulfing blanket, unavoidable and indiscriminate, which blocks, swamps, suffocates, and immobilizes more completely than a snowdrift. As Bullins plays back and forth with images of heat and coldness, the harsh external world of reality is associated with ice and snow which, paradoxically, turn the characters’ internal worlds into a fiery hell. The “I” and “S” sounds which constitute the speech, constantly lurk behind its pained music. Ice “grows” as if it were some grotesque, deadly organism or cancer.
The above quoted passage is quiet and gentle. Its slow, sighing rhythms and long vowel sounds contrast sharply with what goes immediately before, Steve's reliving of the robbery: "We tied them; I twisted the ropes about the blonde's wrists so she would never forget. Cliff gathered the money easily and locked it in his briefcase; it was all finished in seven minutes. The best job was over and done; it was finished I was done, all over and done." (P 132). Steve as sensitive, pathetic victim, attentive to his woman, is replaced by Steve as resolute, business-like criminal venting his frustrations on the white woman. The tone is vigorous and jubilant. The focus has suddenly shifted from internal feelings to external actions; from stasis to abrupt, violent action. A tense, jabbing rhythm communicates the exhilaration. The affirmation of finality and success in the repetition which concludes this retelling of the robbery contrasts with the failure of resolution, the sense of imminent crisis with which Steve's memories of New England Winter tail whimperingly off.

Steve masterminds the robbery to get enough money to return to Liz. The seven scenes are composed of flashbacks to two times in Steve's life: the evening immediately preceding the robbery which takes place in 1960 and his New England Winter of 1955. The opening scene shows Steve, the perfectionist of the group, forcing Cliff, Bummie, and Chuckie to have a last dress rehearsal of the robbery. "We can't rely upon distorted senses of reality to..." (P 135), Steve insists, though in his own private life he is unable to bear out this admonition. The rehearsal proceeds uneasily, the fractious participants continually threatening to let their bickering spill over into outright physical violence against each other. Steve is established as a man, strict on form and detail. Crime
provides him with an outlet for his energies, a means of transcending the role of passive victim to which society has condemned him. It transforms him from pawn to controller, gives him an opportunity to exercise his talents for organization and to satisfy his craving for order and precision. The poet of the prologue is now the director of a rehearsal. It is made explicit later in the play that his New England Winter of five years previous had finally shattered the delicate balance of his mind. Finding himself engulfed by a near-suicidal and sudden upsurge in sens of meaninglessness and desolation, he also discovered that Liz had withdrawn whatever support she had been able to offer him and, no longer ever able to recognize him, had retreated behind her own insanity.

Also in the First scene of the play it is found that the seven or eight years of gap between *In the Wine Time* and *In New England Winter* has been bridged. Cliff is the main character link between the two plays. In *In New England Winter* he is older and more resigned to the reality of his situation. We learn that he and his wife are separated and he is in prison for killing Red. Lou has deliberately left him because she had got a baby by another man. Since then Cliff has been trying to forget about Lou.

Scenes II and III flash back to Liz's apartment in New England in 1955. Liz, who is described as "free of many social restraints, hiding behind her profanity and her professed insanity", talks about Steve to her sister, Carrie, and to Carrie's husband, Oscar. We learn more about Steve as Liz leads us through her world, a mixture of fact and fantasy. Living in a white environment has caused some of the "whiteness" to rub off on Steve: "Steve's lived in snow all his life. All his life, I guess that's why he's so cold most of the time. A cold, hard northern black
... bastard”. (P 149). It has bred in him shame and rejection of his blackness. But he is not entirely without “soul”, not completely lost to whiteness: he may be “cold and sharp and slick like ice”, but “he’s hot underneath.” (P 149). Liz lives in constant fear of losing her black man to a harsh and hostile white world: “For they might come for him ... they might come to steal him away. Steal his blackness .... steal his spirit and soul ... steal his manhood and make him not mine ... nor his son’s to be ...”(P 150). Ironically, it is also through the crime of stealing that Steve himself attempts to rescue his manhood, his spirit and soul, from and existence of limited possibility.

Liz is terrified when Oscar and Carrie remind her that Steve has been deserted from the Navy and that it is only a matter of time until he is caught. Out of desperation Liz erects a barrage of profanity to avoid having to face realities, to cover the aching void of silent, shattering acknowledgement. And she submerges herself in a fantasy world of warmth and sunlight to negate “the dark and cold and loneliness” all around: “We’ll take our baby swimmin’ in the warm Florida waters ... and splashin’ in the California Pacific ... Oh, we must love quick ... quick and hot and hard.” (P 150).

Liz is also upset that Crook, “a two-bit con man, hustler type and talker”, (P 131) is waiting to take over when Steve is gone. Crook smugly tells Liz that he will wait; he is confident that she always makes it “with the next guy who comes along”. (P 152). Oscar and Crook, neither of whom cares much for Steve, get the runaway sailor drunk and leave him dancing the “slop” while they scheme to get rid of him.
Scene IV returns to 1960 for an argument between Steve and Cliff about their mother, the two “disappearing spirits” (P 160), who fathered them, and their own confused relationship as half-brothers. Bullins contrasts the two men. Both have been deformed by social pressures, but Steve is a more obvious casualty. His emotional life has been frozen. He says that he doesn’t have feelings, emotions, sympathy, tenderness, compassion.” Steve’s machinelike ruthlessness contrasts with Cliff’s warmth and genuine brotherly love.

Scenes V and VI flash black to New England. Steve, drunk has blacked out on the couch and is discovered by Oscar and Crook sleeping beside Carrie. Oscar is angry, but rather than fight Steve, he reports him to the naval authorities. Steve is taken away and a crazed Liz is comforted by Crook, who she thinks is Steve come back to her.

Scene VII returns to the robbery rehearsal. Bummie insists that before they all leave there are certain personal matters which should be cleared up if they are to put their lives in each other’s hands. In the tradition of Ibsen and Miller, and as in Clara’s Ole Man, the revelation of a crucial secret precipitates the climax. Steve kills Bummie before he can divulge the details of his past affair with Lou. Ironically, Cliff already knows about it. The play ends with Cliff, Steve, and Chuckie getting rid of Bummie’s body.

In this play Bullins has grasped the essence of a culture and made it unique and emotional. It is a haunting, uncannily desolating piece of work, quietly possessed and self-possessed. The “melodramatic” elements of madness and violence receive their dramatic validity from the psychological and social pressures which the writing encompasses : every action bears the weight of the
past and the future in which "whitey" is the unseen but real threat." Steve's subservience to white values has drained him of all emotions while cliff is able to return them in abundance through being trace to his own self. Steve has lost all feeling. His emotional life has been frozen:

Steve. No. I can't feel ... don't want to if I could. That's for you, big boss. Me ... I don't have feelings, emotions, sympathy, tenderness, compassion ... none of it.

Cliff. What's wrong with you ?

Steve. I don't need it ... it slows you up. I wouldn't have any of that sickness in me if I didn't have to deal with people like you.... Is something wrong with you or something ?

Cliff. Can't you tell ? You've known me for quite a while ... Yeah ... there's somethin' wrong with me. I feel. Mostly I feel good. I have emotions. Mostly I'm so emotional that I have to drink myself to sleep after I become exhausted by a woman, and I don't give a damn who knows I feel or have the emotion of a man... (PP 161-62)

Cliff lives in and enjoys the present. Steve uses the present as a means of paying up the debts of the past. The conversation between Cliff and Steve soon after Bummie’s killing reveals this:

Cliff. Steve ... Steve ... do you know what you have done ?

Steve. Yeah ... I know ... I know. Now Bummie and me are even...

We are even ! Bummie and me are even now (172 - 73)
The whole existence of Steve Benson is devoted to making right the unfairness of his past. He attempts to rectify the "Crime" of being born Black by thinking white. Steve's obsession is revenge for the past. He exists in a constant state of racial self-betrayal. To him Liz and the New England winter represent the only means by which he can escape from his Blackness. Steve brutalizes Grace, the blonde cashier, seduces Lou, Cliff's wife and kills Bummie who tried to tell Cliff about his relationship with Lou, all in order to protect his view of himself.

Bigsby, in fact, gives a concrete opinion on the play. He says that race is not the point of this play, it is clearly its circumstance:

The characters are outcasts pressed back into a desperately small physical and emotional space. They eke out their existence in the interstices of a social world which they do not command and which hardly features as a conscious element of their daily existence. Political impotence demands a stress on sexual potency; social insignificance creates a determination to establish a local reputation for violence or sexual dominance. Anger is deflected from its logical target until it becomes reflexive, self-destructive.

The Duplex was produced in 1970. Although the third of the 20th Century Cycle series, it was produced before In New England Winter. Steve Beson is the central character in the play. In this play, set in a Los Angeles rooming house, Steve courts his landlady Velma, whose husband O.D. lives with another woman but regularly returns to rape his wife and take whatever cash she has. Observing Steve's affair are his roommate Marco Polo Henderson, and various friends and neighbours who gather for cards and parties and whose relationships amplify and
comment upon the play's explanation of its theme. Subtitled *A Black Love Fable in four Movements*, *The Duplex* observes Steve's growing love for Velma and his gradual assumption of responsibility for that love.

*The Duplex* elaborates on its theme by presenting a range of male-female relationships, most characterised by some degree of physical and emotional abuse. However, Steve seeks a healthier love, at first only in an idealised form, but gradually in a more concrete one. About halfway through the play, in a rare peaceful moment, Steve, in this play a writer reads Velma one of his stories. In response to the moment of intimacy the story creates, Velma tells Steve that she is pregnant by him; Steve refuses to abandon her as Marco advises and thus challenges the conventional attitudes of his male companions. Later in the play, Steve's romantic story is balanced by a long in the play, Steve's romantic story is balanced by a long speech in which he castigates himself and his friends speech in which he castigates himself and his friends for refusing to provide women with the love and security they need. Men perceive women's desire for these things, he says, as preventing them from pursuing some inarticulate but obsessive ambition for greater things, something they are not now and they will never be in future too. Thus his words serve as an unheeded rebuke to Marco, who blatantly uses his girl friend Wanda as a convenience.

However, not all the women in the play are victims, nor are all the men exploitive. Marie Horton, who will become the central characters of the Cycle's next play, is a good-time woman, wanting from men only the pleasure which is of mutual benefit. The men lease Tootsie Franklin, her former husband, because
Marie, still his good friend, had demanded and received his entire weekly paycheck.

Steve’s resolve to remain with Velma symbolises his desire to confront reality rather than to confront himself with romantic illusions. However, he fails to keep his resolve because O.D., who returns to claim his wife, is the stronger man and almost kills Steve in their fighting over Velma. Steve fails also because Velma is too tied to her abusive husband to accept the love Steve offers her.

In the fourth play of his Cycle, *The fabulous Miss Marie* (produced in 1971), Bullins first turns his attention to the Black middle class. His setting is Marie and Bill Horton’s Christmas party. The action is interspersed with monologues through which the characters reveal themselves and their pasts. The guests Marco Polo Henderson and his girl friend, Wanda, Marie’s niece; Art Garrison, identified as Steve Benson’s cousin; and Steve himself, who ultimately replaces Art as Marie’s lover and “house boy.” Gafney, a new character. Gafney is a black militant and is in love with his rhetoric. He is resented by the older generation but considered too militant by some of his peers; and he is challenged as a sham by the con man, Art. An array of other characters—Bud, Toni, Ruth, the women, childhood friends of Marie—complete Bullin’s portrait of the middle class.

A powerful, willful, domineering woman, Marie is lusty and pleasure seeking. Men who choose to tangle with her must give her what she demands. She certainly is a match for Art, who thinks he has successfully exploited her by exchanging room and board for sex. But Marie unceremoniously throws him out when she discovers his attentions to Toni.
The generosity and vulnerability beneath Marie's tough exterior only emerge slowly. Childless because of a bungled abortion for which she still blames her husband, Marie is deeply wounded by her childlessness, as well as Bill's philandering not because of his infidelity, but because he has fathered a child by his latest woman, who is white. However, when Bill's employer of many years fires him for his personal conduct, Marie is outraged, and she loyally intervenes by calling on the employer's wife, for whom she has worked as a maid. Infidelities and recriminations seem to fill the Horton party, but ultimately both are completely satisfied with the life they have built together, one solidly based on a bond of mutual respect and affection.

Bud and Toni have less substance. Bud is a high school math teacher who prides himself, not to be in a ghetto school, and is not puzzled by his students. Toni, a social worker, is completely self-centered, insensible to the world of social and political realities. Ruth, independent and loyal, is a more likeable character, but her ambitions are also personal. Her sense of life is confined to immediate relationships and maintaining her financial independence. All the women in the play are childless; the details used by Bullins suggest that while Marie's class and generation were not without genuine vitality, they have little to pass on. This idea is made vivid in his treatment of Wanda, who has none of Marie's characteristics and whom Marie resents. Dependent, vulnerable, and easily abused, Wanda is a ready prey of almost every man at the party, including her uncle Bill with whom she has been having an affair for some time. At the play's conclusion, pregnant by either Bill or Marco, Wanda leaves to live with Marco although she knows he does not love her.
Toughness is valued in *The Fabulous Miss Marie*, and there is little excuse for being innocent, although those who exploit innocence are neither admirable nor justified. If there is a judgement in the play, it is of the characters’ selfcenteredness. Marie’s liberality and generosity, both material and emotional, are what make her “fabulous.” Her generosity, however, stops short of her niece, who really needs her, and the toughness that allows her to deal with Art arises from her own ability as an exploiter; neither her generosity nor her resilience is the stuff on which the future can be built.

Billins returned to his Cycle with *Home Boy*, (1976) an episodic series of encounters between two young Southern Blacks, Jody and Dude, who plan to go North. Neither one’s ambition really extends beyond placing himself in a Northern setting, sitting on a street corner drinking wine. Dude actually makes it, while Jody’s trip remains a fantasy. At the end, Jody asks a question the play does not answer, “Are we the victims, the survivors or the casualties?” A subdued piece, laced with blues songs for which Bullins wrote the lyrics, *Home Boy* meanders, like its characters, going nowhere.

The next play in the Cycle, *DADDY!*, returns to the urban setting where Bullins’s imagination is most at home and to a character, Michael Brown, to whom he has not attended since *A Son, Come Home*. When, after a life of poverty and struggle Michael’s record hits the top of the charts, he and his girl friend Candy move to New York and a posh Central Park West apartment. His sudden rise to fame and affluence, which brings him back to New York from Los Angeles, also threatens his relationship with Candy and forces him to confront his former wife and four children, still without money and living in the poor Neward
neighbourhood where he left them twelve years before. The play is a delicate study of Michael's painful reexamination of his marriage, his relationship with Candy and his responsibilities to his children. This makes a man, his world, his nation, his family, his circle, but seldom himself alone. Michael muses in a monologue. Never having had a daddy, he finds it difficult to take responsibility for those he loves or to allow others to make what he himself acknowledges are legitimate claims on him. A clumsy attempt to take responsibility for his children by bringing his two sons to New York to live with him and Candy nearly results in disaster. Michael finally learns about a different kind of manhood from Carter, the patient and steadfast man who has been living with his former wife, Jackie, caring for her in spite of her alcoholism and finally fathering her twelfth child. The scene is remarkable: Michael arrives with a gun in his pocket, ready to kill Carter for striking Michael's daughter during a quarrel. Carter, too, conceals a gun and calmly finishes the dishes while he relates to Michael what the past twelve years have been for him and Jackie. By the time the dishes are finished, Michael has acknowledged that Carter has become the real father of his children. While he continues his contact with and financial support of his family, Michael resolves to marry Candy, who is pregnant, and to begin anew, hoping this time to learn that aspect of manhood which is expressed as "Daddy".

Many familiar Bullins themes are sounded in *DADDY*! and many familiar questions raised. However, the play moves closer than did earlier plays to delineating the nature of the communal bond and its effect on personal and social identity, or, more accurately, how that bond is expressed or denied through love, loyalty, responsibility, and sexual identity. Michael, like many earlier
Bullins characters, feels conflict between a sense of himself and, inextricably, his manhood as best expressed in solitude, without bonds, without ties to place or material possessions, and his sense of guilt and personal failure for abandoning the family his love for a woman has produced. Likewise with Candy, he feels her demand as a social expectation that he is obligated to fulfill in order to be a man, but that his inner sense of himself compels him to resist. DADDY! attempts to resolve that conflict, in part by revealing that the bonds of responsibility and freely given love ultimately supersede those of kinship and, certainly, those of passion.

III

Dynamite Plays


Bullins instructs that this play is to be enacted “in a location that is frequented by a white audience”. The room, or playing area is one place,
“a four-sided enclosure with ceiling. Painted black”. “The single setting is a street-lamp, near the center of the space”. The entire set or space represents a Harlem street corner, the street-lamp being the only illumination at the beginning of the ritual”. “Musicians are concealed somewhere in the space, behind a... or false wall so that they can view the action unmolested and play to the emotional tensions, but be invisible to the audience”. (P. 5)

“Only twenty-five people are allowed into the play during a performance. And these people must be predominantly white”. (P. 5). They should try to “distinguish the set from the real things in the room and wait for the play to go on as they uncomfortably stand around and whisper to themselves”. (P 5)

All the characters of the play enter the place as the audience, not distinguished as being actors. As Jackie is drunk, she bumps a white person and puts a question to him, “Hey... do you know what’s goin’ on?” (P. 5). Poppy, who is not far away, answers, “Not so loud, baby... there’s a show goin’ on” (P.6). As Poppy addresses Jackie as a “baby”, Jackie reacts angrily asking Poppy not to behave in that way. In the mean time, Outlaw also asks a white man about what is going on at the place. The stage direction that follows is quite interesting as it gives the actors freedom to continue action and dialogue with the audience to that extent when they can reveal the real personality of the characters whose roles they are playing in the drama:

Whenever one of the ACTORS start a conversation with one of the audience, THEY take it as far as it can possibly go in vocal and physical action. THEY follow the situation to its most absurd conclusion: being that JACKIE is drunk, POPPY is a junkie needing
money for drugs, OUTLAW has made a career from mugging white people, TRIGGER does anything in the way of violence, mostly helping OUTLAW, CORNY is a quarreler and semi-drunk street-person, and SISTER will get into anything where SHE thinks SHE might score some cash.

Whichever way the audience goes, the ACTORS go counter to it or with it, whatever is most unlikely and threatening, even into physical abuse: scuffling, rape, strong-arming and beating the audience.

When Jackie again talks to a white audience in a fit of drunkenness and utters the name of Corny, Corny immediately reacts. The next moment Outlaw or Trigger takes someone’s wallet or purse. When Poppy shouts that he has seen the culprit and demands bribe for detecting the pickpocket, Outlaw and Trigger pose that they are innocent and are not involved in the crime. Jackie pretends to console both the white audience and the black actors by entreating the Lord, God in heaven and asking them to have faith in Jesus. Towards the end, the play suddenly turns to be a revolutionary one and Corny becomes the spokes man of the revolution first he asks the audience not to shoot the cops who come on their way as they only obey the orders of the persons running the government. Then he says:

SHOOT SOUTHERN CONGRESSMEN!
SHOOT THE PRESIDENT... HE'S CUTTIN' OFF WELFARE AND PUTTIN' PEOPLE OUT OF WORK AND TRYIN' TO DESTROY YOU WITH BIRTH CONTROL PILLS AND WORMS IN YO' WATER... AND SENDIN' YOU BOY TO VIETNAM!

... ... ...

SHOOT YOUR GOVERNMENT... THEY'S THE ONES MAKIN' WAR ON YOU! (P. 15)

This statement is immediately followed by another climatic revolutionary dialogue addressed to the Black people:

GET YOU GUN AND JOIN THE REVOLUTION, BROTHERS... AND CHANGE, CHANGE THIS SHIT!... AND CHANGE THIS SHIT!

... ... ...

GET YOU GUN ... IS DEATH ANY WORSE THAN THIS, BROTHERS ...

CAN THEY KILL US ANY MORE THAN THEY HAVE ALREADY? (P 16)

When the last whitemen quit the place, "Full noise of sirens, crowd sounds, gunfire, riot, revolution sounds" are heard with "Energy music" (P 16).

The revolutionary speech of Corny shows that the play is in agitprop tradition. It speaks of Bullins' version of agitation against the white people through slum Blacks turning upon their white audience, so that he could make his play more purposive and practically useful to Black people.

*It Bees Dat Way,* like Clifford Odets's *Waiting For Lefty,* erases the line separating actors and audience. The audience becomes a part of the performance.
The whole theatre or the playing area is one place, “A four-sided enclosure with ceiling” where Black actors are planted in the white audience. “Only twenty-five White people” who are allowed into the play during a performance are “a regular theatre audience and they look about for seats... as they uncomfortably stand around and whisper to themselves”. (P 5). The audience are quite confused about the real starting of the play when the Black actors,” start the performance. The confusion of the white audience continues till the end of the play as the one after another. As the audience does not get the seats to witness the show, they are, so to say, forced to participate in the show in an uncomfortable standing position. The technique of planting ‘Black’ actors among the ‘white’ audience and performing the play in an enclosed space without a specific stage having a “street-lamp” as the single setting “near the centre of the space,” is certainly an innovation.

Among the plays included in Four Dynamite Plays, published 1972, Death List appears to be explicitly revolutionary in content. The play is dedicated to “The Palestine National Liberation Movement (AI - Fatah) and its striking Military Wing (A-Assifa Forces) acting in the Occupied Palestine”. The title refers to a list of Blacks prepared by the revolutionary group for execution because of their support to the state of Israel. The play consists of only two characters - Blackman and Blackwoman - who represent opposing views regarding the decision of the Central Revolutionary Committee to exterminate those Blacks who have signed a statement in the Sunday, June 28, 1970, edition of the New York Times in support of Israel. Blackman, who has been chosen as triggerman, goes on methodically reciting the names of Blackmen and women who have signed the statement
terming each of them as the “Enemy of the Black People” and insisting that they are to be killed. Countering pointed to his appalling recitation, Black Woman pleads for non-violence. She goes on persuading Blackman to reconsider his stand and to cure himself of his obsessive neurosis. She asks Blackman; “I know that your revolutionary triad has been chosen to destroy these people ... but does it have to be you who pulls the trigger ?.... Isn’t there another way ?” (P. 22). The Blackman ignores her throughout her speeches and remains preoccupied with his preparations and insists on enforcing the decisions of the Central Revolutionary Committee. But the Blackwoman continues to argue:

These people are old, ignorant, idealistic and reactionary ... but they are still our people ... in the most profound sense... we must reach out and help them or ignore them and go on with the revolution... but must we murder them as well ? (P. 23).

The Blackwoman stresses the need for Blacks to identify with the citizens of Algeria and Morocco who have won freedom from colonial powers. She believes that the Black nation also must do the same here in the United States. She also emphasizes the need for a political party to unify Blacks in America, a party “backed entirely by the people” because then only “there is only victory in sight (P. 25). She complains that it is only Black capitalists who aid the Black people’s enemies by joining hands with Zionism and the C.I.A. As the passionate dialogue continues, Black woman asks:

Is there not another way ? A way that we might see the end of this revolution in our lifetimes or else win some concrete goals that the
following generations can build a foundation for the future upon? (P. 27)

When the Black man remains adamant in fulfilling his duty saying “I know my duty,” she bursts out:

Your duty! Your duty! ... Where did you get that from? Who taught that to you? ... What white man’s ideological system have you swallowed from his library and twisted it in your fantasies of power, manhood and identity? (28).

*Death List*, though similar in certain respects to Baraka’s *Experimental Death Unit #1*, is also an improvement over the latter. Baraka’s revolutionary unit imposes the nationalist ideology on other Blacks and treats both Whites and Blacks as enemies. It does not weigh the two sides of the argument. The decision of the Revolutionary squad is accepted without any doubt by all Blacks in the *Death Unit*. Both these plays strive to forge racial consciousness among Black masses. But the two differ in their method. Baraka tries to achieve his goal by total destruction, and Bullins by forging brotherhood and unity among Black masses without killing black brothers. Blackwoman in *Death List* knows that the correct target of guerrilla activities is not Black brothers. She explains:

We knew that we had to engage in guerrilla activities. Bombings, assassinations, espionage... Our targets were the pigs, of course, their facilities and selves, and those devils who enter our communities by day to exploit us, to investigate and administer to us or to use our bodies and spirits for their gratification... then steal out by nightfall... were moved on when they wouldn’t escape
As Blackman continues his roll call, Blackwoman asks “Do you think that what you are going to try and do will change everything?” (31). This is almost similar to Easley’s question to Walker in Baraka’s The Slave. But difference lies in their responses. In Death List Blackman kills himself which in a way symbolizes the failure of the ideological position represented by him. In The Slave, Walker kills his opponents implying success of his nationalist ideology. Towards the end of Death List, Blackwoman identifies herself with the spirit of Black consciousness and criticizes Blackman for being dogmatic:

There are some Black People, you know, some who seek the future. Some who believe in the nation. Some who wish to move into the new world. Some who conceive value systems, Black value systems and live them as new revolutionary Blackmen and women. There are some who have not surrendered to death or its impulses to be a white thing of destruction. Yes, my brother, my man, my husband, my lover, there are those who will truly raise the dead and foretell the future in our times. Actual Black nation-builders. But not you, killer...(32)

Blackwoman argues that the Black brothers seem different because it is only they who are getting closer to Blackness. She asks a pertinent question:
“Who entitled you to designate the enemies of the Black people? Because they don’t fit into your narrow conception of what Black people should be doing and representing” (34). She explains that all Black people are Black in one way or another, and so they cannot afford to lose any, and that one cannot unite them by destroying Black people. She declares that “There’s no one on earth more vicious to a Blackman than a nigger who is threatened by the Blackman with losing his imaginary place beside the whiteman” (35). Concluding her long passionate argument with Blackman she warns:

Beware, my Blackman. Think of your condition and history. Do not underestimate negroes as you have done with whitemen. Niggers were taught to kill by the supreme killer of the Universe, the white / beast/devil. (35-36).

*Death List* questions whether the image of death dealing with revolutionary ideas is not finally perverse and a self-destructive fantasy of “power, manhood and identity” (28). Blackwoman pleads for the awareness of Blackman that behind his roll call are more than sixty Black lives – a plea her companion ignores.

In order to bring a change in Blackman’s attitude Blackwoman designates him as enemy of Black people by asking him a series of pertinent questions:

Are you not the true enemy of Black people? Think hard now. Are you not the white-created demon that we were all warned about?

Is it far more than superstition that you accuse me of to say that you are own greatest threat to survival now, in these times? (P. 37)
Blackman is quite optimistic about bringing a change in the hard-core Blackman bent upon shooting the so-called enemies of the Black people by arousing in him the spirit of love and a sense of belongingness towards her:

The optimistic Black woman waits for the return of the Black man, anticipating a change in the latter. She warns:

Wherever you go, think of me. Whatever you do, remember what I say to you, what I feel about you. And know that I’ll be here waiting ... If and when you return. I am your woman. ... your Blackman... even though you have no ears, words or mind for me. I love you and wait for you ... and that is our only hope for the future... Remember what I say, my man. That is our only hope. You with me... and me with you... and we together with our children and brothers and sisters as the nation. (37).

This highly emotional and heart touching speech of Blackwoman brings about a positive change in the character of Blackman. Instead of shooting the Black people in the death list, he shoots himself to facilitate the building of a true Black Nation.

As a true revolutionary play, *Death List*, is very much in the leftist tradition. A leftist orthodoxy requires conversion-ending for plays, the male protagonist of the play moves from a state of negation to a state of positive commitment at the end. Blackman develops his racial consciousness and sacrifices his own life for the sake of uniting the Black people to build a Black Nation.
Thus *Death List* unequivocally stresses the need for racial consciousness, the need for unity among Black masses to build a Black Nation. The play offers a sharp contrast to Baraka's *Great Goodness of Life*. Whereas in Baraka's play, the protagonist kills his own revolutionary son to keep himself alive, in *Death List*, the protagonist kills himself to make way for the building of a Black Nation.

Before continuing the Cycle, Bullins turned his attention directly to the matter of race relations in *The Pig Pen* (produced in 1970) and *The Taking of Miss Janie* (produced in 1975). The former play also constructed around a party, centers on a racially mixed couple, Len and Sharon. Bullins leaves no one unscathed in this play. Len, knowledgeable about Afro-American history and culture, has been instrumental in awakening his black friends to their own history and Ray to his talents as a poet. But Len is married to Sharon, a spoiled, irrationally demanding, young Jewish woman who is insensitive to the nuances of her situation. A range of characters participate in the party: Mackman, who is white and trying to be cool; his black girl friend Margie; a group of musicians who double as a combo for the play; and Ernie, militant and hostile, but most eager of all the guests to participate in the central feature of Len's parties, his sharing of Sharon with whoever wants her.

The apparently random events of the evening suddenly fall into focus with the play's abrupt ending. Mackman, who has gone out for more wine, hears of Malcolm X's assassination. When he announces it, Sharon registers delight; Len remarks that his end is appropriate to his philosophy; and only Mackman, Margie, and Ray truly mourn his death. The others are too drunk or stoned to care.
Mackman, however, must bear his grief alone, for Margie turns on him and leaves with Ray.

The play's title ostensibly refers to a white policeman who occasionally drifts across the stage blowing his whistle, a pointed reference to American attitudes. However, a passage in *The Reluctant Rapist* further elaborates the title. The narrator observes pigs feeding and notes that they are so voracious, were a man to fall into their trough, he would be devoured alive. A deadly and mutual exploitation pervades the party in *The Pig Pen*; Bullins neither condemns nor advocates interracial relationships; he simply points out the sickness that permeates them.

IV

Other Plays

The other short plays of Bullins are very unexpectedly reactionary and revolutionary. They clearly advocate for Black nationalism with beautiful blend of bitter individual and social experiences of Black people. His *The Pig Pen* observes the beginning of the decade of black militancy, *The Taking of Miss Janie* marks its end. A pointed, often comic, but essentially mournful, and even bitter reflection on the 1960s, *The Taking of Miss Janie* relates the thirteen year relationship between its Black hero, Monty, and the blond Janie, whose rape forms the play’s prologue and epilogue.

Bullins' medium is the party and the monologues through which the characters and their pasts are revealed. Janie is attracted to Monty by the poetry he reads in their creative writing class. He invites her to his party, meaning from
the very beginning to have her, but waiting for and opportunity, for she, for the next thirteen years, insists on keeping the relationship platonic. Her resistance does not indicate sexual innocence by any means; at one point in their relationship, Monty helps her obtain an abortion and nurses her through it, and she confesses to having had many lovers, both black and white. Rather, her resistance is a curious blend of canniness, power, and idealism; both a perverse way of prolonging the friendship and a genuine desire to keep it free of exploitation.

The party includes various familiar Bullins characters: Rich, a strident black nationalist who scolds Monty sharply for inviting Janie and continuously insults her. Janie's boy friend Lonnie, a cool third-rate musician who ultimately is condescends to "spades"; Len and Sharon, whose marriage has weathered the decade; and two women in Monty's life, Peggy and Flossie. Len's rhetoric has not changed; he still considers himself to be a great teacher, but from Sharon we learn he has turned capitalist, excusing himself as an intellectual. Peggy, now a lesbian, had married Monty and supported him through school while he conducted a passionate affair with her friend Flossie and a platonic one with Janie. Finally, Mort Silberstein, an unkempt and impoverished drug dealer, is a composite portrait of leftist radical, Beat poet, and 1960s hippie. He engages Monty in loving not white women, but rather Freud, Marx, Einstein, and Jesus, to which Monty retorts that Mao, Fanon, and Voodoo are the sources of his inspirations. The play concludes with the prologue to the rape with which it opened.
A comment on the 1960s, the period of powerful awakening of Black consciousness and creativity and of apparent mitigation of the worst of white racism, *The Taking of Miss Janie* sees little of lasting value. "We all failed ... We failed in the test of the times ... We blew it. Blew it completely," one character tells both those on state and in the audience. Len and Sharon have not completed endured, although Sharon has matured, while Len has rigidified and compromised, rather than come to a richer understanding of himself. Between Monty and Janie are traces of real friendship and intimacy, but the effect of the play's structure is to suggest that the entire decade was little more than a stalking and a tease, for at its end, in spite of everything that occurred, all Monty really wanted was Miss Janie. What saves the play from despair is the brilliance of its comedy; Bullins' quarrel is with what people did, not with what people essentially are, and his criticism, while savage, remains humane.

*The Taking of Miss Janie* is Bullins' retrospective comment on the turbulent decade of the sixties—the decade of the Civil Rights Movements, the rise of Black Militancy and nationalism and the flowering of the Black theater. Commenting on the play, M. Dasan says:

In *The Taking of Miss Janie*, people fail because they conceal from themselves and from one another both their strengths and their failings, using various strategies of rhetoric. Bullins suggests that underneath all the rhetoric wanted was only Miss Janie. He got her at the end, but Monty has to move on from there. The future of Black in America depends on Monty themselves.
Bullins' dramatic focus has remained consistent throughout his plays, the loving and relentless exploration of inner forces that constrain Black people from realising their freedom and potential. In directing his attention to this concern, Bullins simply assumes what Baraka chooses to explicate that racist America has formed and deformed aspects of the Black experience and consciousness. The constraints that interest Bullins most, reside within his characters and are of their own choosing. Even his portrayal of interracial encounters focuses on the behavior of the Black characters rather than on the perversity of the whites. For instance, Rich in *The Taking of Miss Janie* sees the Blackman's running after white woman as suicidal:

> With all the sisters out here in the world these deaf, dumb and blind negroes are waiting for the devils women to give them some of their Stale Ole cold, funky buffs and make them feel like man” (P 228).

Rich also proclaims the inevitability of the end of white domination and the emergence of Black consciousness. He says, “Your reign the earth is nearly up, devil. You have ruled in your allotted six thousand years and now it is time for the Blackman to rise” (P. 221). Despite all the revolutionary rhetoric of Rich, Monty chooses to run after Janie and is determined, to enjoy her. He tells her, “I never wanted anyone at much as I have wanted you” (P. 265).

Bullins' play, *Jo Anne!* was published in 1973. It confirms the fact that Bullins continues to write both "Black Revolutionary" plays and "Black Experience" plays. *Jo Anne!* is based on an actual incident in American history. The play portrays the trial of a Black negro girl, Jo Anne, charged with the...
killing of the White Guard who tried to rape her in prison. This case, gets wider ramifications because the Black woman was not only fighting for the rights of women against sexual assault, but was trying to defend the long neglected rights of Blacks and women to get equal justice in the South.

Viewed in the background of the Scottboro Case and Rodney King Case, the play becomes a powerful satire on the American legal system, exposing the duplicity of the whites who interpret the U.S. laws to keep the Blacks under control. Jo Anne’s case “goes to the very heart of the question of whether a black woman has the right to protect herself from a whiteman”.26 In the play the culprit, Guard All Goode, a symbol of White supremacy, racism, sexism, and male chauvinism sits as Judge Hopgoode during the trial of Jo Anne. During the trial when Lawyer Cane points to evidence to prove the charge of rape, the prosecuted raises objection. The judge in his own interest allows the objection to sustain, denying a change for the defendant. This mockery of justice is so powerful and ironic when Judge Hopgoode openly justifies his southern or “Carolina Justice”: “Evidence is evidence. And when you can’t find more, you invent it. And when you discover some, you obscure it” (15). On another occasion (in Scene II), when the Prosecutor questions All Goode as to why he told lies about his and Jo Anne’s dreams, he answers. “Well ... it’s a kind a like this. It seems at this point that everybody’s lying right?” (30)

In the play Bullins also satirizes White Liberals, Black activists and Feminists who view Jo Anne’s case from personal and feminist perspectives. However, Jo Anne proclaims amidst sounds of cheers and applause that her “victory is a victory of all oppressed women in this land” (43)
The play does not end optimistically, for, as lawyer Scott points out, no amount of heroism on the part of Blacks would change the Southern Americans' attitude, U.S. laws and inter-racial relationships. All attempts to achieve equal justice and the revolutionary rhetoric and the claims of “victory” are of no avail, as Lawyer Scott remarks:

She won, she says, won completely ... For all the oppressed women in this land .... But I know so many things ... I know what's happening now. And I know what the immediate future holds for Jo Anne ... And when Jo Anne is returned to jail, she will be almost completely forgotten. In a year you can mention her name ... and most people will say Jo Anne who ? The public which was so up-in-arms about All Goode case will have abandoned her forgotten her. The activists, who worked for her acquittal on this murder charge, will have drifted to another cause. (44)

Jo Anne ! concludes with the frustrating statement that the Southern law treating Blacks as animals will remain unchanged in the United States. The Reporter reiterates what Lawyer Scott had already expressed:

This case seems to be as dead as the Guard All Goode. Now the mob ferver is spent, the blood has dried, the activists have migrated to more 'relevant' activity ... now, at this hour, justice sleeps soundly in the South. (49)

His next play A House Party does not have a conventional plot structure. It apparently portrays Black life in an atmosphere of singing, dancing, and celebration and stresses the need for the Black people to keep away from liquor
and dope. The Harlem mother in the play says: “If people in Harlem could stay away from liquor this would be different place”. 27

Abstaining from liquor and dope is suggested as a prerequisite to create / recreate the Black spirit and consciousness among Black masses. The statement f Bullins in his The Theme is Blackness is repeatedly here as he wants, “The future of Black theatre”, “will be in its evolution into a profound instrument of altering the slave mentality of Black Americans”. (P 14)

A House Party is taken as a printer to the type of plays that Bullins is continuing to write. One is quite right in saying that he is relentless in exposing and correcting the ills and weaknesses of the Black community. Like his early plays already discussed, A House Party also articulates in no ambiguous terms the need for the unity of all Black people. Black audience must agree with the view expressed by Rapper:

The time has come for us to rise up as men and reellers of our destiny. The time has come for us to assume our roles on the world stage of revolution — No more will we stand for the degradation and humiliation of this living death. No more will we stand aside or watch our fellowmen, our women and children led into the confines of the oppressed. No more will we become accomplices to tyranny, for if one doesn’t fight against this evil government with all resources at his command, whether it be hands, teeth, and feet, then one is an accomplice to that evil…. We are slaves now, this moment in time, brothers, but let this moment end with this
breath and let us unite as fearless revolutionaries in the pursuit of world liberation. ! (34)

We Righteous Bombers is Bullins' full length play on the Black Revolutionary experience. This is the most frequently discussed, the most controversial of all Bullins plays, because of its subject matter. It bears resemblance to Baraka's revolutionary plays in more than one respect. Firstly like Baraka's revolutionary plays, We Righteous Bombers focusses on the Black revolutionary struggle in America. Secondly, the revolutionary group in Bullins' plays shares the Black Muslim faith as do the heroes of Baraka's Black nationalist plays. We Righteous Bombers seems to be a thinly disguised version of Albert Camus' The Just Assassins. Camus' play, set in Moscow, 1906, portrays the conflicts of a group of terrorists who assassinate the Grand Duke, The first attempt fails because Yanek, the man entrusted with the mission sees Duke's children with him in the carriage and does not wish to harm them. He is successful the second time when he finds the Duke alone. Yanek is immediately taken into custody and refusing to bargain for his life, is executed.

Camus's play mediates on the meaning of taking another's life for ideological reasons, even in the name of justice. It also explores each character's search for a return to innocence in the face of the gravity of the act. Bullins believes that the ethical issues raised by Camus are antithetical to the facile ideology of revolution and bloodshed popular with black audience. He therefore reorders the sequence of events in the text of Camus, twists the plot, and adds questions beyond those of Camus. The time of the play is not the past but the future. The play is set against a time when apartheid became the official
government policy and when Blacks were treated “like Pigs, Like filthy .. foul swine in pens.” Walls of electrified barbed wire were put up around every Black Community in America and the movement of Blacks was restricted under military law. The Blacks “had to have passes to go from one neighbourhood to another”(569). The Black area was surveyed by Blacks called Prefects who “were appointed to carry out the slavemaster’s will.” In the words of Bonnie, the senior revolutionary, these Prefects are “more white than the whitest whiteman, negroes who grind the blood, marrow and juices from the Black people to feed the vampire whiteman” (570).

The play opens in a scene of utter social and political chaos, with noises of varied things: engines, buses, jets, trains, gunfire, explosions, dogs barking, men fighting and moaning, and women screaming, all mixed with Black music. The Controlling Military Council is doing everything to rout the Black revolutionaries who are considered enemies of American freedom. The instruments used for this purpose are Blacks themselves in the form of “seek and kill teams.” The Black revolutionaries are engaged in a fierce struggle against White oppression. They begin by killing the black men who are the White man’s stooges. Their ultimate aim is “to bring (blacks) freedom, justice and self-determination... to get something done for black people ... by any means necessary” (563).

The play begins with the Announcer summing up the daily bulletin from American Government Information Bureau pertaining to the guerrilla activity of revolutionaries. The Controlling Military Council is confident that “all Black Revolutionaries would soon be captured and destroyed”. The Announcer admits that it is a time of crisis for America and that “It is vital that all citizens...
understand that the negroes lose their civil and constitutional rights,” and warns citizens “not to give aid and comfort to the Black terrorists and rebels that seek comfort in their midst” (560).

The Black Revolutionary Group comprising six members (Murray Jackson, Bonnie Crown, Sissie Williams, Elton ‘L’ Cleaveland, Harrison Banes and Kenneth Burk) has been formed to fight against segregation, exploitation and oppression, and to bring their people freedom, justice and self-determination. Murray Jackson is deputed by the revolutionary group to destroy Grand Prefect, the Blackman appointed to carry out the slave masters’ will. The revolutionary squad is determined to use violence against White power structures but they “have to get the White man’s stooge’s firth” in order to “cleanse (their) communities” (575). Jackson did not throw the bomb because he did not want to kill the two children with the Prefect in the car. He is against killing Black children. He offers to kill the Prefect at the New Lafayette theatre. But Harrison disagrees with Jackson and argues that he should fire point blank at a Black child, if ordered by the group. But finally Jackson’s view prevails.

Jackson, now in solitary confinement, meets three White stooges, Foster, Smith and Lady Prefect. The three Blacks working for Whites try to dissuade the Black revolutionary hero from his mission. Foster, the “Uncle Tom” figure has been imprisoned for 75 years for having killed a white man. He is made to work as a hangman in the prison. He gets one year knocked off from his sentence for every Black man he hangs. He seems to be anxious to get out of the prison by doing anything the White wants him to do. He requests Jackson also to do the same because he believes that “The world is okay for you boys who get some
education.” He tells Jackson “you could’ a been an administrator ... or sumpten ... in civil service .. with a good lifetime job” (571). Jackson shuns such a suggestion and denies the possibility of his becoming one such because to him that would mean being “in the pay of the white power structure to help keep (his own) people imprisoned and enslaved” (571). Instead, he asserts his revolutionary purpose and exhorts Foster to join the struggle for the liberation of Blacks, to work for a day when “there will be only a world by, for and of Blackmen” (571-572). Jackson also points out the sociological reason why most Blacks take to alcohol and drugs, and persuades Foster to accept the faith of Black Muslim nationalism and to follow Allah, the spirit and shield of the Black people. Though both of these remain unchanged after this conversation, Bullins here gives us a realistic picture of two specimens of the Black response to such questions.

The meeting of Jackson with Smith was shocking to the former because he had thought that he himself had killed the latter. But Smith tells Jackson that the person whom he had murdered was “just another double ... some ignorant actor that took pleasure in dressing up as (him)” (586). Jackson discovers that the Grand Prefect is an imposter, and that the chief of police who interrogates him is actually Grand Prefect. Through the conversation between Smith and Jackson, Bullins reveals how Blacks are used by the White government to destory Black revolutionaries. Like Foster, Smith also tries to dissuade Jackson from the revolutionary path. He says: “You know ... one begins by wanting justice - and one ends by setting up a security force ... secret police, in this case .. to restore and protect justice, of course ... and guarantee law and order, naturally” (581). Smith offers to help Jackson because he can get him a pardon and wants to bring
him a chance for his life. He also persuades Jack “to leave politics and look at the
total human side of Blacks’ problem” and likes “to help him get off” (583). But as he
did earlier with Foster, Jackson denounces Smith and calls him “a flunky
murderer for the Whiteman” (581). Jackson remains firm in his commitment
towards the revolutionary cause of destroying the White power structure. He is
proud of being a revolutionary and likes to be called a righteous Blackman, and
not a “killer,” or a “black man of blood”. He says: “I threw the bombs at your
tyranny, not at a man” (583). Smith, the Blackman’s policeman is concerned
with crimes perpetrated against Blacks by Blacks and ignores the crimes of White
man against his black brothers. He is projected by Bullins as a contract to
Jackson, the revolutionary who is eager to sacrifice himself for his ideology (for
Black struggle, for liberation). Having failed to dissuade Jackson from his path
Smith insists that he should meet and talk to Grand Madame Prefect. He
threatens Jackson that unless he agrees to talk to the Madame, his women,
young Bonnie especially, will be taken to prison and tortured (597). Jackson
rejects all chances to atone for what he has done, and thus gets pardon. He does
not want to be a renegade, but likes to continue to be a revolutionary in the
“righteous bombers unit” and justifies the killing: “When we kill, we’re killing so
as to build up a Black world in which there will be no killing. We have to be
murderers so that at last the innocent and righteous, and only they, will inherit
the earth. (606)

Towards the end of the play, Jackson asks his Black woman Bonnie, “Do
you understand why I asked to throw the bomb?” and answers, “to die for an
ideal — that’s the only way of providing oneself worthy of it” (607). In his
dedication to the Black cause Jackson sacrifices his love for Bonnie and his own life. Jackson expresses his philosophy of love towards the end of the play as "sacrificing everything without expecting anything in return." (615). This selfless dedication produces much effect on Bonnie who also says: "We haven't time to be in love with love because we love such things as freedom, justice, self-determination, liberation, (and) righteousness" (620).

In comparison with Baraka's *The Slave*, produced three years before, *We Righteous Bombers* is more realistic. The heroes of both the plays strive to inculcate racial consciousness among Black masses and resort to violence as a means of achieving this. Whereas Walker Vessels destroys everything associated with the White world of decadence, Jackson wants to destroy only the Black stooges. He wants to save the children because they will inherit the earth to build up a Black world in which there will be no more killings. Thus in Jackson we find the ideal revolutionary Walker grown more practical and realistic.

Jackson's third meeting is with Grand Lady Prefect. It may be noted that when Foster (Uncle Tom) and Smith (Black Policeman) failed to influence Jackson, the White power structure works on Madame Prefect (Symbolising Christianity) to try her hand. Madame Prefect tells Jackson: "I want to tell you that God is the only one who can justify your (actions)". But Jackson explains the difference between her God (Christian) his God ("the new holiness ... the Black holiness of Allah") and argues that "the Church had kept for itself what it calls grace, and left for (them) something that is called charity" (601). The more Madame entreats him not to consider her as his enemy, the more vehement he
becomes in denouncing her. He feels that she is forcing him into the unnatural way of life like “the syphilitic prostitute”.

Foster, Smith and Madame Prefect are all agents of the White power structure. Even the Military Council is controlled by Whites. So every action of the revolutionaries is watched by them. Even the conversation between Jackson and Madame is taped by Smith because he wants to report it in the papers as proof of the former’s repentance. Inspite of all their cleverness, the overt and covert methods of the white government and their agents, they fail to dissuade the Black revolutionaries from fighting against tyranny and oppression. All efforts at dividing the revolutionary group are thwarted. The revolutionaries remain committed to the goal of fighting the white power structure and of destroying Black stooges as a first step toward achieving this goal.

The play ends suggesting that the fight will continue through the years. After seeing over TV, the sight of Jackson being taken to be executed, Bonnie is inspired and assumes charge as the revolutionary to throw the next bomb, even against the policy of the organisation not to have their women on the direct firing line. She is happy and feels relieved to follow the footsteps of Jackson fully knowing that she will also be hanged like Jackson one day. Sanders rightly comments that, “It challenges every aspect of plays dealing with revolutionary violence... For Bullins, whenever blacks talk of killing other blacks or actually kill them, for any reason, only the oppressor is served... For Bullins internecine revolutionary acts fall into that category”.

The three plays of Bullins, *We Righteous Bombers*, *Death List*, *The Gentleman Caller*, represent three stages in the Black Liberation struggle in
America. In *We Righteous Bombers*, the revolution leader is executed by the white establishment. This is symbolic of the power balance during the early phase of Black struggle in America, characterised by Black defeat and white victory. In *Death List* the revolutionary realises, though belatedly, his foolishness and erroneous racial stand and shoots himself thus passing the way of Black brotherhood and group solidarity. In *The Gentleman Caller*, the Black Maid takes the initiative to put an end to the endless years of servitude by killing her white oppressor and his Black accomplice. As one of the requirements of "Black Arts Drama", these plays of Bullins assume the responsibility of educating the Black people and making them aware of the need for the struggle for liberation.

*Black Commerical #2* is a short play based on the theme of Black nationalism. The scene opens on a Saturday night at "a pig-feet emporium and whiskey, beer, and wine joint in the Black community". The crowd is found watching two characters, Rufus and Blue, occupying the Banks floor and attempting to kill each other. Rufus breaks a beer bottle and tries to gouge Blue's eyes out. Blue on the other hand holds his friend's arm in one hand and refrains him from killing him.

When Rufus threatens to kill Blue, and Blue abuses Rufus, the crowd (the Black Chorus) shouts, "KILL KILL KILL... THAT BLACK MATHAFUKKER !" (P. 131). Then they tussle more furiously and the crowd shouts "BLOOD ! BLOOD ! BLACK BLOOD ! BLACK BLOOD !" (P. 132). When Rufus tells Blue to let him go, Blue asks him to wait till he murders him with a knife. In the meantime a young Blackman steps out of the crowd and addresses both the fighters as "Brothers." This address has tremendous effect on the contenders to stop fighting at once. But when both
of them are confused as to their relationship as brothers, the crowd supports the
Black man by repeating “BROTHERS ! BROTHERS ! BROTHERS !...” (P. 133). Then
both Rufus and Blue realize the real meaning of the term “Brothers” and help
each other. Then the Black man, the catalytic agent for uniting both the fighters,
steps back into the crowd and chants with it:

Black brothers, Black brothers, Black brothers... Black Black.

Salaam... Salaam... Salaam... All praises Due to the
Blackman (P. 134).

The play ends with a typical announcement about Black consciousness:

THIS BLACK PUBLIC AFFAIRS ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE POSSIBLE
THROUGH YOUR NATIONAL BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS BROADCASTING
COMPANY (BCBC). (P. 134)

The American Flag Ritual is a very short play or film scenario. A young
Blackman enters having a bulky object under his hand tied by cord. The man
kneels and unties the bundle carefully. He winds the cord into a ball and deposits
it into his pocket. After he pulls his hand from his pocket, he stands, looks down
at the unwrapped bundle, then kneels again. “He slowly unfolds a large American
Flag”.31 Faint music in the background is heard “to suggest a solemn,
ceremonious, religious, official public act (is) to be performed”. (P. 135) The flag
is unfolded. The man stands in its center, just a bit southeast of the field of blue
and the white stars. “He reaches into his pants fly, pulls his penis from his pants,
and upon the initial tones of the American National Anthem, begins to urinate on
"Old Glory". As he relieves himself, the music plays and finally dies down and stops as his last drops dribble to an end. ... He shakes himself, puts his joint away, zips his pants up, wipes his feet on the 'stars and stripes', then exits". (P. 135). Thus the play reflects the Black man's anger and resentment against the "Old Glory" related to the American Flag.

*A Street Play* is set on one of the corners in 125th Street in Harlem. The play begins with Actor I walking "up to a Black Panther selling Panther newspapers". He addresses the Black Panther as brother and wants to know about the ideology of them. He says that just he heard their "boss" Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, "say that the Muslims were counterrevolutionary... or somethin' like that ... and I was wonderin'... if you patternin' your newspaper methods after the Muslims because you want them to become real revolutionaries like you..." (P. 141). At that time Actor 2 joins and says that "Cleaver's callin' for a race war between black people and whites.... Cleaver's doin' the writin' 'n talkin' ... to make a political threat against whites" (P. 142). Then Actor 1 again wants to know to which group of revolutionaries the Black Panther belongs to. It they belong to "the Muslims, SNCC, CORE, The NAACP, The Cultural Nationalists, The Urban League, The Preachers" (P. 143). But Actor 2 says that "War is war" and it does not have the banner of any party. Then Actor 1 reacts and says that he himself wants to join the war by taking a loan for purchasing guns and he wants their newspaper to show the Black Panther's message of war to his "Ole lady" so that she will be inspired.

The short play, thus ends with message that when the entire community is in crisis, there is no need for one to register himself in a group or institution to
be known as a rebel. Every individual must have to be a rebel to fight for the common cause even without institutionalising himself.

*Street Sounds* is another short play and is meaningfully subtitled “Dialogues with Black Experience”. It was, first performed in La Mama Experimental Theater club in New York city in October 1970. The characters include Pigs, Harlem Politician, Dope seller, Soul sister, Black revolutionary artist, Black Dee Jay, Corner Brother, Lover Man, Mad Dawg, Seduced and abandoned, Traffic man, Errand Boy and Scrapbook keeper and many others. The play depicts only the statements of the above said Black characters expressing their consciousness.

Pig declares that he is no more a pig. He is rather a Black panther, a Black protestor. Harlem politician says that he must take a Little graft so that his constituency people can know him and his record on Civil rights and they must be impressed. Dope seller, Soul sister, Black revolutionary artist claim their rights. The Black revolutionary says, “We have country of our mind, my brothers ... We have country of the mind that is black terrain. We pull our ways up our intellect's insurmountable peaks. We loaf in its gray depressions ... We, ourselves, are parched from the endless safaris across our brain's vast expanse”. The Scrapbook keeper is a very conscious character too. He says:

I am a young Black man but I know that I will be an important Black man. ... I have a destiny to fulfill .. fate too that is determined by the Black Goods. ... So I wish to chronicle my every effort ... The Black man needs heroes, brothers, .. and I, of course, shall be one of the greater Black heroes, so course, shall be one of
the greater Black heroes, so the Black World needs me. We must document our past, brothers and examine our present .... You can quote me on that ... Yes, brothers. My scrapbook will not only contain my ideas, memories, opinions ... but my likeness, my history, my presence (P. 153).

Black writer, the thief, fun lovin', the rememberer, The doubter, the explainer, the recluse, Black critic, Black publisher, Young West Indian revolutionary poet, the theorist, the Rapper, and Finally Harlem mother declare their cultural, historical, social and literary victory. *Street Sounds* is apparently an epitome of African-American voice in reformation. It goes on heralding what the Black people think really.

The ideas that we gather from the analysis of both the long and the short plays of Bullins are very valuable. Each of them has distinct messages embroidered through various dramatic techniques. They are quite fitful for the purpose of writing under the ideology of The Black Arts Movement. To serve our purpose, we can quote Mayo Sandra Marie, a famous critic of Bullins' plays. He says:

> Most of the plays of Ed Bullins are conscious efforts to promote a cultural nationalist perspective and a new black aesthetic. His work came to the force during The Black Arts movement which was struggling to define itself in terms of black values, separate from teh mainstream of American literary and theatrical criticism. During the heyday in the movement (1965-75), he was serious artist committed to the cause. Bullin's theatricality stems from his roots
In fact his depth as a dramatist is practically effective. It comes out of his blood with all vigour and with all individuality. In an interview with him, Jervis Anderson, Bullins himself says:

through risks he takes as an artist, he challenges others to look at worlds they have not previously known, and to re-examine the value of the world in which they live. In addition to, being a prolific playwright like Baraka, he has persistent and significant attempts to establish centres where Black theatre could thrive.

Commenting on the universality and uniqueness of Bullins, a number of critics have given their appraised and appropriate comments. T.S. Stelly says:

Eugene O’Neill, Clifford Odets, William Saroyan, Sam Sephard and Ed Bullins employ exotic settings. This helps them furnish him with symbolic dramaturgical elements which are used to create plays that express universal themes ... readily transforms them into symbolic plots ... Ethnic, regional, and subcultural materials also provide sources for metaphoric dramatic language.

In this way we also find Bullins serves many purposes in his plays. These include his gross him of creating social consciousness among the African-American community. But his specialty lies in reviving the culture, art and myth of them
Baddest brother in the New Black Theater Movement —— a writer committed to the forging of a Black aesthetic Bullins brings to the community and artistic synthesis of the fold oral and formal literate Traditions. From the Oral tradition in Black culture, he extricates our trickster and bad riguh types and infuses them with the life blood literary characterisation.”

Bullins uses the Blues motif as one of the important aspect of his plays. The Black World writes, that Bullins’ plays display the realities and contradiction of black life with this blue motif. For him “the blue is tragifantasy. It is in its stylized exaggeration of (hence fanciful). Black suffering (hence tragic), a paradoxical combination of the real and unreal.”23 Thus his two categories of plays viz, 20th century cycle series and ritualistic dramas artistically integrate his revolutionary message through the inspiration of the Blues, Bullins blue people enact drama of their lives in rhythmic step with various blues notes. The tunes and types selected are those soulful, funky sounds of the blues-jazz tradition. The emphasis on black music in Bullins’ productions is not merely and artistic gimmick. It serves both as a symbolic representation of a psychological states of his characters and as a cultural reaffirmation. Black music plays a vital role in Black life style and survival. This Goin’a Buffalo has “Deliah” and “Parisian Through fare” “Sketches in spain” are typical black musics played throughout the play in the contexts of racial and cultural consciousness. Mamma sings “like one of the old time red hot mammas” (29). In act two, piano player, Bass player and
drummer take a lead role. Chorus of yells (P. 76) is effectively sung in the play too. In *Clara's Ole Men*, "AM radio plays rhythms in blues music". Similarly, *New England Winter*, *We* come across with "Blue Monday" and "Do the twist": in addition, when Steve, Oscar and Crook are engaged in conversation in the end of scene three, Bullins instructs of singing of "Shake Marilyn Monroe", while Steve continues dancing to the radio (P. 157). In *The Corner*, the playwright prefers to introduce king pleasure singing "Monday's Mood for love". Throughout the scene other music of the period plays (P. 99) *In the Wine Time* has gospel music of "mythic blues", whereas *The Duplex* has got the music of "After hours" and *The Gentleman Caller* has "New Black music plays: Sun Ra and Milford Graves".

Apart from a strong musical renaissance in the Black Arts Movement, the artists of the period have tried to their best to influence Black people by recollecting their cultural and mythological background. Ed Bullins has reflected enough of cultural and mythological background of African-Americans in his plays written out of the so called movement. In *Goin'a Buffalo*, we find Art's memory of the West Indies, North Africa, Tangier and Philly: whereas in *A Son, Come Home*, we find Mother's emphasis on "spiritual mother". The peaceful valley of Philly is again reflected in *Clara's Ole Man*. *In the Wine Time*, Lou speaks of "Virginia in the woods" (P. 134). In *The Electronic Nigger*, the effort for cultural revival is rather modern, "Creative writing of Mr. Jones and his "seaching out human values through art" (P. 232) is to be worth noted down. Mr. Jones' awareness regarding the duty of a Black writer is remarkable. He says "Does not the writer have some type of obligation to remove some of the intellectual as well as political, moral and social tyranny that infects this culture? What does all the
large words in creation serve you, my Black brother, if you are a complete whitewashed man?” (P. 239). Bullins make Oscar speak in: “Kingfish dialect” (P. 156) and in “Andy dialect” (P. 157), which reflects his ancestral memory of language.

What distinguishes Bullins’ from others with similar concerns is that he seeks a definition arising from the imaginative and social context in which his characters live, through which they understand themselves. The question “what does it mean to be a black man” “By Black he does not mean black-as-opposed-to-white, like Baraka. He does not, even unconsciously, depict modes of behaviour that counter various insidious stereotypes. Bullins means by his question one of the world’s riddles, and in some degree he succeeds in formulating answers in black terms. Sanders says:

In Bullins’ plays black figures stand securely in black ground; they no longer symbolise the “Other”, and are therefore, capable of achieving self-understanding. Bullins’ work exemplifies black drama’s maturity. In doing so it reveals something of what it means to say a literature has matured, and something of the truth in the paradox that it is only when the particular is most perfectly realised that the universal is most eloquently expressed."

It can be said that the creative output of Bullins has to be taken in its totality in order to comprehend his vision. His work as a whole has accomplished what he had planned and hoped to do, that is, to show black people and image of themselves they could live with. Unlike the ideological, revolutionary theatre of Amiri Baraka, which aimed at shaking its audience into agit-prop action, Bullins
believed that his job was to show black people who they are, where they are, and what condition they are in. It is most likely that the impulse continues.

W.D.E. Andrews says of Bullins' plays that:

The best of Bullins work would seem to confirm the general conclusion that art and politics may come from different imaginative “levels” of the personality. If the art is good, original, deep, authentic enough: if the latter is the case (that is, in the case of good writers) the artistic insight is prophetic, “true”, at a deeper level, and for a longer time, than any political idea can be.  

Bullins is one of the Black American writers of the 60s who writes out of an immortal and committed fierceness of Black identity. He refuses to accommodate their vision to white sensibilities. In each play Bullins attempts to hit a different exacerbated nerve in the life of the Black Americans. He denies being a working class playwright; he says that he is from the criminal class. So he is an artist of the height of Richard Wright or Lorraine Hansberry.

Almost all the plays of Bullins realistically portray the Black life of hunger and absurdity of existence in the white dominated America. Bullins dramatises the striking moments of Black consciousness in them too. This kind of portrayal in plays can rightly be called as “Theatre of Black Experience”. These plays present Black People who are striving to become middle class and whose dreams are determined by the frustrations. In his Dynamite plays and in the Cycle plays, Bullins has made exclusive attempt to create an extensive, imaginative, Black world that he and his audience can revisit for further exploration and
understanding. These plays present Black audience with authentic images or reflections of themselves and accord to the ordinary Black experience a prestige that it has not enjoyed in American culture. It also inspires in those who live such a life, the sense that however deprived they may be, they represent the basic cultural tradition of Black America. It is a part of the necessary effort to build a moral self-esteem. Bullins turns to the plays of Black experience because he believes that the experience of Black American is the only authentic experience that can reveal to the world the deep-rooted injustices prevailing in his country.

Notes


2 From "Ed Bullins' Interview with Marvin X", New Plays from the Black Theatre ed. (New York: William Marrow and Co, 1971) x.


All Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and have been incorporated in the text itself.

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7 Ibid.


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12 Ibid.

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14 Ed Bullins, *The Gentleman Caller* in *Contemporary Black Drama: From *A Raisin in the Sun* to *No Place to Be Somebody* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971) 368.

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19 Ibid.


All Subsequent references to this play are to this edition and have been incorporated in the text itself.

21 Bigsby 252.

22 Ed Bullins, It Bees Dat Way in Four Dynamite plays (New York : William Morrow and Company, 1972) 4

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38 Smitherman, 6.

39 L.C. Sanders, 228.