Chapter - 2

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS THEMES:
ARTICULATION AND DRAMATISATION

Bullins is one of the Negro writers who writes out of a fierce sense of black identity. He wrote his autobiography at the age of eighteen and a ponderous novel, short stories, fantasies, dreams, poetry, and published mostly in little Negro magazines and underground newspapers. In 1965, he began writing plays. The white problem in America is at the core of all Bullins' work. Bullins' obsession is with the corruption of black integrity by white values. His plays are composed like effigies, specially designed to torture his enemies. Bullins' gifts as a writer have been demonstrated in Electronic Nigger and other plays. Bullins is too good a playwright to write
a play of rhetoric. Instead he turns out something which might become a minor classic of Black theatre.

Ed Bullins is a member of the Black Arts Alliance (an organisation of Black Theatre Groups). He assisted Le Roi Jones in film-making and stage productions on the west coast. Though influenced by earlier writers like LeRoi Jones, Bullins retains a strain of individuality and has a firm hold on art. In the introduction to The Black Quartet, Clayton Riley, defining the mood and movement of Black Art, says, "Further it brings the thing down front where we all can see what it wants to mean has to mean". Thus the tension between art and ideology leads to a chaotic structure. However Bullins is able to give most of his works a definite form. He makes street life into Art. Art is no longer for the sake of Art. It has purpose: to create a New Reality or to recreate the lost reality thorough a process of altering consciousness.

Bullins affirms in an interview that the Black artists

.... are working towards something entirely different and new that encompasses the soul
and spirit of Black people and that represents the whole experience of our being here in this oppressive land. We are attempting to take all the things that are positive in us, our music, our very strong religious expression, our own life style and incorporate them into an art on a collective basis.¹

The experience that is projected in the plays is a defined experience. It is an experience of the Black man seen by Black eyes and felt by Black consciousness. The White man is simply set aside so as enable the black writer to write honestly of Black reality. The revolution that came along in the beginning of the seventies brought about an awareness as a result of "a moral conflict " between" The Hellenistic ideas and their soul." A Black artist using the medium of the theatre is committed to an act of 'altering consciousness' of not only the Black intellectuals who have become victims of the 'cultural propaganda' of the Whites through educational Institutions, but also of the 'Schizoid misfits' amongst the Blacks. Thus with an awareness of oneself a new Black art emerges from an exploration beyond their skins.
In the process of this exploration, writers like Jones initiated a deeply personal insight and 'a brilliant formulation of destructive will' which is a result of the oppressed self. The Black writers of the sixties showed a sense of Black Nationalism which demanded an act of militancy and the revival of Black myths and folklore. The orientation towards the musical blues, evoking a sense of struggle and revolt, brings about a sense of reality to the theatrical presentation of naturalism. Blues, the music of the humble, obscene, unassuming men and women is both a state of mind and a music which gives voice to the predicament of the Blacks. By its nature of folk music, it creates a polyphonic atmosphere. Paul Oliver claims that "it is the wail of the forsaken, the cry of independence, the passion of the lusty, the anger of the frustrated and the laughter of the fatalist. It is the agony of indecision, the despair of the Joblers, the anguish of the bereaved and the dry wit of the cynic .... The blues can be entertainment, it can be the music for dancing and drinking by the music of a class within a segregated group."²

Music, a central force in the emerging ethos of the black artistic consciousness, is one of the life renewing resources that has enabled
Afro-Americans to survive. It is the "laughing to keep from crying life styles". As Ralph Ellison defines it,

The blues are not primarily concerned with civil rights or obvious political protest; they are an art form and thus a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice. As such they are one of the techniques through which Negroes have survived and kept their courage during that long period when many whites assume, as some still assume, they were afraid.  

Thus Ellison feels the blues is an impulse to keep that painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in the aching consciousness of the blacks. Thus transcending the near tragic and near comic lyricism, Bullins evolves the form of tragi-fantasy. His message synthesizes the values and thought patterns of the Afro-American community. He articulates that community's dreams and aspirations in
which the Afro-Americans see themselves in all their terrible ugliness in
the hope that from that profound glimpse they would be cleansed.

Therefore Bullins also adds to his naturalism a dimension of
menace, the atmosphere of ever-lurking death and destruction, projecting
the idea of the Imminence events have with deadly probabilities. Bullins' ideology works within a framework of the very elements of the Black Society, that of the street culture. He glorifies his characters without romanticizing them. Nobility in the Black spirit is discernible irrespective of the evil or the immoral element as it stands in contrast to the evil that is prevalent in racist America. Thus art and life are no longer different from each other. They become one.

Moving into the seventies, the Black theatre emerged as a 'revolutionary instrument of change' with manifestations of Black artistic, aesthetic, and cultural revolution. The idea of assimilation or even the back-to-Africa movement failed. Consequently, the emphasis on Blackness and the assertion of one's Black self with pride becomes the concern of Black writers. An attempt to assimilate is considered a means of subjugation and the negation of the Black self. Therefore writers like
Bullins through 'Black theatre consciousness' try to alter the slave mentality of Black Americans. As he claims, his theatre is "a sanctuary for the recreation of Black spirit and African identity as against the evil, white world of ever-shifting values and reality".4

In one of his earliest collections of writings, The Hungered One, the essays figured under two subtitles, The Absurd One and The Hungered One. It consists of a wide ranging selection of short stories and essays collected from different magazines of the sixties. These stories and essays are not dated. Thus they give no scope for the study of a chronological evolution of Bullins' style of writing. Unlike the general trend of the period of the late fifties and the early sixties wherein American writers carried on a muted battle to salvage new forms of aesthetic independence from diverse and diffuse constraints that they felt operating in the society and culture of the post-industrial America, Bullins depicts in his works a sharp relentless realism, though not in the traditional sense. Bullins' characters, though existing on the margins of American culture with a strong African pull seem to thrive on the chaotic circumstances that surround them.
By and large the mood of *The Hundred One* is substantially varied. Numerous literary devices are used. Bullins constantly deals with the ambiguous and the aberrant. Pace and subject change continuously. It is a half parodic and half reflective note. It is about a well travelled and slightly pretentious writer, jaded by the affected culture of the literatti being challenged by one who is committed. Beginning on a light note with mild hilarious references, it ends on a sober serious note. "My Id can lick yours any day Moon writer." It is a parody on writers who talk of moon and stars, the heavenly bodies and the heavenly bliss, being little aware of the commitment and suffering on earth. "People dream of going to the moon ... I'd just like to get back down into living". The purpose of his writing is to move away from the idealistic and the romantic to the realistic. It is not the "heart aches and a sweet numbness pains my senses", but "mah pain is in mah brain .... yawn!" It is not a mere recollection in tranquility, but

.... The past is with me each night-hobbling on
cloven hooves holding hands with dead dream
masks that even drugs can't dim. They dance
Bullins very clearly draws a distinction or a line of challenge between the Apollonian represented by the moon writer and the Dionysian referred to in the "goat songs." If in the moon writer the Afro-American consciousness gains the dimensions of a Dionysian Id, its "deserted soul" asserts his enmity "against the institutions of the white man" in The Enemy. We find already a rebellious tone when he sees the state as "the supreme evil to [his] existence". After the two reflective essays, The Excursion and An Ancient One are a fine, lucid descriptive short notes depicting the absurdity of situation. The Reason of Why captures an autobiographical moment which elucidates the tension, insistence and loftiness of aspirations as a writer.

There is but one question and that is why I wait each morning to try to write or why watch it pass with bitterness with hate without making a mark upon paper, passing as a signal that the death of one added sun and moon nears.
my work to its final completion, though there is little upon paper as testimony of the passing ...
each day without working is surrender to death. Sixty I see myself, sixty with nothing is surrender to death ... A life spent in searching for that unknown something that is seldom found. 6

The Real Me is a satirical monologue which subtly exposes not merely the character in the story but also the listener, a listener who is conspicuous by the absence of his speech. In The Real Me and The Drive there is an element of disillusionment and despair. In The Real Me there is an attempt to cover up or even accept defeat bravely. In The Drive:

It wasn't the thing of their being whores that depressed him; he'd bought some and sold some before, he mused; it was because he hadn't spotted them when they stepped through the door that made him uneasy. It made him unsure of himself. 7
As he expected things to change at least after the war, he still finds whores instead of "nice wholesome ... little office girls ... or young married broads ..."

In *He Couldn't Say Sex*, Bullins deals with the turmoils of a suppressed teenage psyche. The struggle is not between the colour-conscious segments but the struggle within a society on which both the economic and moral poverty is enforced. *The Rally* or *Dialect Determinism* is a frightening journey into the theatre of black politics. It is here that we see the germ of the work that is later transformed into realistic plays. This story is an indirect warning to the black political leaders against the reaction of a meaningless ritual lacking internal content.

The rally leader seems to possess the political agility of the "ideological proteans." In his attempt to change roles he is an agitator, Hitler and even Malcolm X during the rally. These leaders merely satisfy the ideological needs of the crowd, thus carrying the crowd along with them. Thus the section, *The Absurd One*, ends with a prophetic note on
the messenger which goes back to the idea of what an Afro-American writer would be, not a moon writer but a "messenger".

The blackman lives in song and poetry. If I could only sing truth, ... Isn't the black man truth, bother Steve? Isn't he fact; are you your own dark lie, or does the lie belong to the devil? 

The Hungered One is the most outstanding piece written in a "spare language and playing on starkly disturbing motifs of horror." It is a story about a creature resembling a bird:

The strange one ... pecking with its viscous beak, about its companion's flitting feet. It was larger than the other birds ... no feather clothed it, its tinted skin looked scaly, thirsty and hot ... four legs which sprouted from its muscular, squat body grey and coarse.
This, part bird, part animal, is a creation of a gargoyle from Bullins's consciousness. It reflects the dual nature that is imposed on the blackman, the part animal, part human role that is thrust upon him. The story is about a man who tries to befriend it, pity it. "Its hooked beak came within a hair of the nuts, causing its labours to be of little profit." However, "the strange one" turns on his benefactor, tearing apart his hands, burrowing into his chin, ripping apart the palm. Thus Bullins takes us into the baroque depths of the literature of the grotesque. In the strange assertion of morbidity Bullins brilliantly combines the symbolic and metaphoric narrative forms. So is The Saviour replete with different images from the psyche swinging between the states of sleep and wakefulness. "Figures emerge from mist." It is in his dreams that he sees the symbols of freedom and flight. Once awakened he is blind-folded, led by the arm and has to grope in darkness. The Saviour ends with a symbolic ambiguous incomplete sentence. "He pleads to be saved from .... From what and from whom are questions that provoke the reader to think. In The Wine time and Helper are narratives which later evolve as plays.
The Reluctant Voyage is the archetypal image of the Afro-American consciousness caught in the existential dilemma of being both an African and an American like

One of these strong flyers further north, in a place where fresh water comes to meet the sea; the poor creature had assumed that all water is the same. In the cold of the day, it had lazed like a duck upon the serene surface of a lake until the water had frozen trapping the white soarer in the ice.\textsuperscript{10}

Travel from Home and Mister New Comer are the narratives which depict street culture. "Support your local police" and "Dandy" are clearly autobiographical. There are different notes of confession, one of his literary achievements and the other of the "secret pleasure of an adolescent lover in the peasant black south."

Although these essays and short stories do reflect a powerful reaction against the predicament of the Afro-American, they remain
reflective responses to an individual's dilemma. It is through the genre of theatre that it is possible to present the struggle of society at large, as Bullins thought.

Bullins in his introduction to "The Theme is Blackness" reaffirms the important function of the Black theatre as the 'creative practice' of the social and cultural milieu. There is a great need to bring about a social and cultural change. Therefore altering the human consciousness through 'creative struggle' involves the creation of collective forms. Thus according to Bullins, Black theatre becomes a citadel of evolving consciousness.

Consciousness can never be anything other than conscious existence and the existence of humanity is the actual process of life. Life is not determined by consciousness, but vice versa. That is to say, one is not born with consciousness. Consciousness evolves as the individual grows and his life style impinges on his consciousness a certain pattern. Thus to alter consciousness one has to alter the state and condition of life. As Don Evans asserts, "Bullins' theatre is the theatre of confrontation. One is forced to look within oneself and reach the depths of consciousness which trouble one's quiet moments." Certain critics feel
that there is a lack of explicit message, as most of Bullins' plays present street life in all its glory. However, it is these simple ordinary Black folk whose sensibilities are shaped by the common street culture who are mirror images of the majority of the Afro-Americans. Thus the street culture niggers become the concern of the community.

Bullins' collection of five plays, *Goin' a Buffalo*, *In the Wine Time*, *A Son Come Home*, *The Electronic Nigger* and *Clara's Ole man* are plays depicting the street culture and the working class. A shift of emphasis from an all white back-drop of the first play to an all Black setting in the later ones is perceived. In *Goin' a Buffalo*, "The room is done in white, white ceiling, white walls and white overly elaborate furniture"¹² emphasising the predicament of the people caught up in a white world. The moral standards of the white world cannot impose ethical restrictions on the Blacks. The morals, beliefs, and the customs of the society the Black is living in become inadequate and in the process he is forced to define his own ethics and create a new reality.

Within the interior of the front room the light is a mixture of red, blue, and violet with crimson
shadows bordering the edges of the shape to
create the illusion of a world afire, with this
pocket of atmosphere an oasis.\textsuperscript{13}

To recreate reality, the very basis of human existence has to
undergo a change. Existence precariously balanced between the past and
the future gains meaning only when one considers an individual's
relationship with the others around and the ability to come to terms with
one's self in a given situation resulting in emotional, mental and situational
conflicts.

In \textit{Goin' a Buffalo}, the action takes place in Los Angeles in the
West Adams district during the early sixties. A group of friends plan a
holdup that will allow them to escape the ghetto. They choose to go east
to set up a little business in Buffalo, "a good little hustling town". Money,
the main concern in their lives, is needed to buy a car, maintain women,
pay bail, or bribe a judge. Without money there is no freedom and
respect. The paradox is that in order to buy their freedom they must resort
to illegal acts that endanger the very liberty they seek. The characters are
thus always in provincial freedom, if not always under surveillance. They
have the skill and the know-how of the trickster and they can fuse pragmatic realism with their dreams. If they cannot live in the best of all worlds, they can at least live in a better world. Bullins' play has a double dimension; his characters alternately confront sordid and often tragic life and drift towards an imaginary and unrestricted universe. The dramatic movement in Bullins' plays thus oscillates between real and imaginary worlds and constantly shifts from despair to hope, from submission to anger, and also from revolt to inaction and from tenderness to violence.

Bullins' characters in *Goin' a Buffalo* primarily exhibit a conflict, in an attempt to maintain relationships. Therefore, in this play emotional and the mental conflicts are emphasised in contrast to the situational conflict which we often find in other plays.

*In Goin' a Buffalo*, a small box containing an aphrodisiac serves as a magical instrument of metamorphosis. The box belongs to dancer pandora. At the request of her friends, pandora opens her treasure and passes it around: the lights modulate and soften the atmosphere which becomes airy and erotic. Each person is carried off to a private world of
myth and fantasy, the place in reality that is most propitious to this kind of hallucinations is the "habit of whores" where one can totally let go. The magic lasts until it is interrupted by the imperious ringing of the telephone. Once the charm is broken, the interrupted activities and forgotten cares resume. Bullins does not seek to explain why ghetto residents take drugs. Rather, he conveys the quality of that experience and evokes in the spectator a state similar to that of his characters. The situation is not analyzed. It is dramatized.

The hallucinatory scenes are always interrupted by the intrusion of reality. At the end of the second act a fight breaks out in the cabaret where Pandora works. The police come and make arrests. Money must be found for bail. The drugs that turned the dreams into life have brought danger. The selfish and calculating Art can succeed in his plan to escape to Buffalo only if he eliminates those the police point out as guilty. He does not hesitate to lie in order to get rid of his "brothers" and to have Pandora and her white prostitute friend all to himself in the snow of New England. He takes the two women away and leaves his companions, including Curt, his friend, and Pandora's lover to the icy walls of prison.
The traitor here is depicted differently than in the revolutionary theatre. Art, who unscrupulously gathers up the loot and his friend's mistress, is not condemned. In the law of the jungle, plans can go awry and friendships break up at any moment. The will to survive is so strong that it leads to any sacrifice for self-preservation. Art does not have to answer any one. He is an individual set against the whole society. His only aim is to succeed in the venture he has taken up.

Yeah, I cared but I just didn't let it bother me too much. I just froze up on everything that tried to get in and not too much touched me.¹⁴

Next to the traitor, however, are the other characters who struggle to defend their integrity. Pondora is forced to accept the fact that love is "something you will never know anything about". Unlike Curt, Art seems to be more considerate and understanding. What Pondora couldn't find in Curt she tries to see in Art. She is blind and ready to let Art seduce her. She leaves for Buffalo unaware that her new lover has betrayed his associates and is planning to exploit her talent and charm without giving her love in return.
Paradoxically, it is Art who is the scoundrel. He remains too distant from the group to accept the moral code they all follow. But his betrayal perhaps appears more as an initiation than infarction: having eliminated rivals and companions, he will now be the only pimp and leader of the gang. At first, a docile spectator and shrewd figurehead, he now becomes a full-fledged actor and the roles are exchanged. Art takes over from Curt who has otherwise seen him as worthy successor.

Man you’re like a little brother to me now, man I watch the way you act around people. You think on your feet and study them like a good gambler does. You’re like me in a lot of ways. Man, we’re a new breed, ya know. Renegades. Rebels. There’s no rules for .... we make them as we break them.15

In defining the game, dominated by the arbitrariness and profit, Curt justifies a priori the way Art will apply his principles like a good initiator. He offers Art a reflection of the outlaw’s destiny, and like a good
disciple, Art beats him at the game the hustle. Scheme, or double game is thus set up as a model for living.

These activities in the play structure the relations the characters maintain among themselves and with the world. The hierarchy of the dominant society is repeated among these marginal types in which each person exploits the other or is exploited. The victory of tricksters like Curt and Art consists in duping the society, in owning nothing, and in taking as much as one can. Art proclaims "I am not a giver. I am a taker." The marginal figure also possesses a trumpcard superior to any title that cannot be taken from him: his wit which is the source of his fortune and good luck.

In the structure of *Goin' a Buffalo*, game-playing assumes an important role. It defines the ordinary occupation of the characters as gamblers who risk life and money. It especially structures their relations, orders, their behaviour, and deals with their plans, attacks, advances. The game of chess that opposes Curt to his friend Rich furnishes a key to the entire play. The black and white pawns also suggest racial groups. The chess game is a dress rehearsal for the action. Each matter sends
out signs that let us know if the venture will end happily. Premonitions, predictions, foreshadowings abound and in this game. The chess game also presents a ritual that follows us to establish the hierarchy within the group. Curt the leader never loses. But even the victor is known in advance. The match is still interesting because one must know how, by what rule and in how long a time the other will be put in check. Playing the game is more important than its outcome. The game thus offers a discourse on drama. What counts is not the end since it is foreseeable by different indices throughout the play. What is important is the strategy that leads to it. This game goes on routinely, Rich loosing and Curt winning until Art joins just as. The Black pieces are about to be put in check by the white. By moving a single piece, the Black King, Art saves the situation. The spoken lines that accompany the game have double meaning as commentary of the players about the man and as commentary about the drama pre-figuring the reversal that will follow.

It is important that Art does not know which side to choose. His remark "It's according to which side I am on" also reveals the ambivalence of a role that seems to occur by chance. By moving Rich's pieces, Art puts Curt in check. At this stage his decision still seems to come arbitrarily, yet
his remarks during the game: "Most kings need a queen to be most powerful, but other do the best they can" or "When you play the game you look for any break you can make" predicts his behaviour in the next scene when he takes Pandora away. When Curt, who is Art's equal match asks him to play. Art accepts the challenge. Now Curt's rival, he becomes the black king who will not be checked and who will hold on to both queens.

In the Wine Time is characteristic of Bullins' concern with the "Inner life" of Black people and of his attempts to reject the confines of traditional dramatic forms. The entire play occurs in one evening, a hot August night, on a small side street of a large northern industrial city, in the early 1950s. The central characters in the play are Cliff Dawson, a man in his mid-twenties who is attending college on the GI bill. Lou Dawson, Cliff's wife, is a woman in her early twenties who supports her family by working in a laundry and is pregnant when the play begins. Ray, Lou's restless teenage nephew, who has lived with Lou and Cliff since his mother's death some years before and now wants to join the navy as Cliff did when he was younger. Surrounding these people and moving constantly in and out of their lives are neighbours and friends. All of the
characters are Black, except for one neighbouring family, the Krumps, and a white policeman.

The sultry summer evening is too stifling for any one to remain indoors. So the characters gather on the front stoop of the Dawson's house. They talk, they laugh, they quarrel, they love, they drink that wine of the play's title. We are shown glimpses of "The Avenue", or commercial thoroughfare, where the inhabitants of this neighbourhood go to purchase their wine and liquor. Until the very end of the play nothing more momentous than this occurs. In the last moments of *In the Wine Time*, Red, an acquaintance of the Dawson's, instigates a fight with Ray. The fight is motivated by Red's efforts to capture Ray's girl, Bunny, and his attempts to trick Ray into drinking bottle of urine. In the ensuing struggle, Red is killed. Cliff takes the blame for the murder and is led off to jail by the policeman. Ray and Lou are let alone to find their own strengths and directions.

The dissolution of the family and the loss of innocence for Ray at the end of *In the Wine Time* are the analogous concerns to other Black plays. In Theodreward's *Big White Frog*, the central male figure was also
removed from the family by a violent final event. Strained relationships and the black male’s manhood are dominant in Big White Frog. In Baraka’s Dutchman, loss of innocence is the central experience both for those on stage and for at least the white spectators in the audience. Yet In the Wine Time is not about the worlds found in Big White Frog or Dutchman. Although the family is disrupted in Bullins’ drama, it is not destroyed, for the love that unites it endures.

We come to understand Ray’s loss of innocence In the Wine Time as a result most of the final murder and also through his mystical relationship with an ephemeral woman. In contrast to Dutchman, the world In the Wine Time never was a world of innocence. We are not assaulted by Bullins’ stage world, nor are we carefully manoeuvered into it.

It is more accurate in fact to see that this is a world in which innocence and virtue are defined. Bullins engages the audience in a world in which behaviour and values suggest an absence of many traditional American notion of virtue and strength. Almost every one in the play drinks to a state of drunkenness and swears profusely. The drinking is a habitual and communal activity as Lou says in Act I, “But their ignorant oil
don't make them yell and hollar half the night ... this wine makes us". Furthermore, Cliff, to his neighbour's displeasure, does not work and reveals no guilt because his pregnant wife remains employed in a laundry. Both men and women are sexually promiscuous. Brawls occur frequently, many characters carry a weapon of some sort. Even the murder even in the end is not astonishing. Given such behaviour, it would be easy enough for any audience to turn away in disgust. Whether its members live in a world similar to that of the play or come from a distinctly separate middle class milieu, Bullins succeeds with a more difficult strategy than one of moralizing against obtrusive, obscene habits. Bullins leads us through the surface of this world into the more fundamental characteristics of these people. He shows us love that transcends and exists simultaneously with bitter quarrels. He presents trust and fidelity that have little to do with sexual monogram. He demonstrates strength unconnected to the puritan ethic of hard work; and he reveals a beauty in language through which obscenity becomes an element of poetry.

In contrast to Goin'a Buffalo, the emotional and the mental conflict in the In the Wine Time gives such strength to Cliff Dawson that in spite of the suffocating atmosphere he finds himself in, he has a sense of
achievement. Cliff Dawson, a former sailor, is enrolled in school in order to elevate himself above the squalor of the ghetto and to overcome the feeling of being trapped. He refuses to come to terms with the stereotypical image of the ghetto life:

I'm goin to get me part of the world or stare your God in the eye and scream why. I am not a beast ... an animal to be used for the plows of the world. But if I am then I'll act like one. I'll be one and turn this fucken world of dreams and lies and fairy tales into a jungle or a desert ...

... There's a world out there, woman. Just beyond that lamp-post ... just across 'the Avenue' and it'll be mine and Ray's.¹⁷

Cliff teaches Ray, his wife's nephew, the dream of beauty in a world beyond. Cliff joins the Navy not with any sense of service to the nation but for a purely personal sense of achievement:
The moon comes from away off and is all silvery, slidin' across the rollin' ocean like a path of cold, wet white fire, straight into your eyes. Nothing like it. Nothing like it to be at sea

Cliff is the new man who can ignore the spineless society to be himself. Lance Jeffers sees Cliff as "the man who has surrendered his manhood to the oppressor." His subservience expresses itself in his empty idleness. Cliff refuses to work so as to revolt. However, he is a loser. His profound anxiety and a sense of dissatisfaction with himself are essential suicide. Thus exists in him a certain complexity of life of the oppressed man as he is compelled to vie with the concepts of both activity and passiveness. Cliff, in the process of asserting his manhood, adopts a suicidal attitude by opting for inaction and in the end in his final gesture of defiance he accepts responsibility for killing Red and liberates Ray.

Once again the suicidal move and the assertion of manhood being brought together indicate an abdication of his life in the garb of manhood which ironically is also the abdication of manhood.
Cliff: ... Just learn this one thing in life ...
when the time comes ... be a man
... however you've lived up till then
... throw it out of your mind ... just
do what you have to do as a man.\(^{20}\)

Bullins skillfully handles the question of the black man's manhood,
the question of the complex nature of his response to oppression which
Lance Jeffers calls the ultimate artistic principle.

Similar to this struggle of the black man is the earthcore strength
and endurance of the Afro-American woman. Love is a kind of black
female strength. Added to her feminine pliancy is the toughness and
vision of experience. She senses that the farmed forces are an instrument
to turn potential black men into alcoholics. She asserts that the black men
are made to feel proud of their directionless lechery and are left helpless,
paralyzed and impotently dreaming.
If on the one hand people like Miss Minny, Beatrice, Mr Cooper, Miz Cooper, Miss Francis and Mr Roy who appear only as shadows create in the ghetto a sense of resignation and a garb of sophistication, on the other Cliff, Lou, Ray and others give vent to their feelings and therefore sound and act rebellious. Among them love becomes a euphemism for lust and lovers substitute humiliation for respect.

Ray : Well, I like Bunny.

(Embarrassed) Me and her's in love.

Cliff : In love? In love?

......

Boy ... you got a lot to learn.

......

Bunny's the first girl you've had?

Ray : Nawh

Cliff : How many?

Ray : 'Bout haf a dozen.

(Silence)

Cliff : Well ... you ain't exactly backward ...?
Cliff always encourages Ray to reach out for the world outside and discourages him from any bound of love and marriage. It appears as though Cliff is trying to fulfill his wishes through Ray. This indicates a search for completeness of the self. Ray gets involved in a drunken brawl with a neighbour. Cliff, to protect Ray, kills the youth and goes to jail. Cliff's choice to go to jail so as to help Ray to go out into the world highlights Cliff's sense of imprisonment and yet a sense of achievement as a man. "I got a tombstone mind an' a graveyard disposition ... I don't mind ... dyin'". Cliff mirrors the vision of the young. Now he need never try to implant his dreams of conquering the world, and he releases to Ray, his, Cliff's fragment of manhood, saying, "It's your world, Ray ... Go on out there and claim it."

A Son Come Home often considered an autobiographical play, portrays a disintegrating family and the final estrangement of the son and mother. Like the earlier play, In The Wine Time, even in this play, A Son Come Home there is reference to Derby Street. The entire play In The Wine Time is set in Derby Street whereas in A Son Come Home there are characters who move out of Derby Street after living there for "over ten years". Moving out of Derby Street over to Los Angeles and Philly has
changed them so much that human emotions don't seem to figure at all in
their actions. The entire action of the play is projected through two other
characters 'Boy' and 'Girl'. They enact the roles of different characters
who are remembered and recollect projections of thought and memory of
mother and son, highlighting the emotional and mental conflicts. They
become various embodiments recalled from memory and history. "They
enact a number of personalities and move from mood to mood."

Andy refuses to marry Bermice when she is six months pregnant,
saying that he is hiding under a different name after escaping from a chain
gang. She later turns to Will, a married man whom her son drives out of
the house when he grows up. The son later gets a job, enters service and
becomes a radical. After nine years in jail he comes back home and finds
himself alienated both with regard to the place and the person.

Son : I walked around some ... sightseeing.
Mother : Sightseeing ? But this is your home, Michael ...
Son : This town seems so strange. Different than how I
remember it. 22
Mother's failure to establish any meaningful relationship with any one drives her to establish spiritual links giving up worldly ones. Son also, disillusioned and disappointed, tries to come back and renew his relationship with his mother. But she has entered a religious sect and does not take coffee or prepare dinner in the house. So he is unable to share anything with her. The son is now a guitarist and wants to take his mother out for one of his performances. She refuses to go. In the end he bids good bye. His response is very cold. She is neither happy nor sad at the son’s arrival or departure. She can easily pray for him now:

Well you're a man now. Michael .. I can no longer live it for you. Do the best with what you have. \(^\text{23}\)

Once again a sense of failure dominates the thematic and the structural pattern of the play.

The Electronic Nigger, termed a Tragi-Comedy, is a reflection on the education system which has become a farce. Its only aim is to produce pseudo-intellectuals. It shows how:
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 ... we are here to discover, to awaken, to search out human values through art!²⁴

The presence of inter-racial students builds up a tension which is at moments heightened. Though there is a semblance of a class room, there is a total failure of the possible rapport between the instructor and the students. The instructor, with a very common name like Jones, is unable to impress the students. On the contrary, with the introduction of Mr Carpentier, Jones is constantly subjugated and set aside in his arguments. Characters in this play develop on parallel lines. Mr Carpentier who claims to be a writer already is in the creative class merely to "become acquainted with the formal aspects of author craft ...." regardless of the other students or even the instructor himself. Carpentier, with the help of the high sounding words and phrases that he uses very successfully, takes over where Jones fails. Yet his success leads others
towards a symbol of death. Carpentier becomes a symbol of death because he alienates himself from the social setting. He refuses to recognise himself as a Black. He ignores his race and generalises every statement. His pre-occupation with cybernetics makes him helpful not to the Blacks but to the whites. The title The Electronic Nigger has a subtle indication of the character who is a puppet in the hands of the whites. The term 'Nigger' has all the connotations of an assimilationist who feigns ignorance of his individuality. Therefore the word Nigger is replaced by 'Black' or 'Afro-American' indicating an awareness and pride in it.

When the students are given a chance to express their ideas for stories reflecting the spirit of the age, it is observed, "Loneliness! Estrangement! Alienation! It is a phenomenon that we observe daily." When the students are given a chance to express their ideas for stories reflecting the spirit of the age, it is observed, "Loneliness! Estrangement! Alienation! It is a phenomenon that we observe daily."25

Both Leonard and Sue suggest stories with "just one character", standing or sitting alone and frightened." Martha and Bill play a stereotypical role expressing an idea "about this great dark mass of dough." “Yeah ... like a great roten ham that strange rumbling and bubbling noises come out of.”26 suggestive of perhaps the 'Negro' not the 'Black' or the 'Afro-American.'
Miss Moskowitz in her "mid thirties", "an aging professional student" tends to fantasize the story that she narrates of a brother and sister being separated from their mother and meeting a lion, which has escaped from the Zoo. Moskowitz calls this story a story with "an historical background." When Bill calls it a tall tale, it is the white characters Sue and Leonard who find a historical parallel in it. The brother and sister could be the conscious Blacks, the Lion could be another character running away from captivity, and to save him the children could achieve even that which appears to be an impossible task. All the "added implication" and the significance of the story is lost in parallel arguments that follow. Once again the play ends on a tragic note, a death symbol.

Clara's Ole Man, a play of lost innocence set in a realistic background, projects characters trying to break away from the garb of sophistication. Clara, a victim of circumstances, is projected as a helpless character who, because of upbringing, is a total failure with anything that she does. She is highly constrained and is ignorant even about herself. Big Girl who recognises the tragic situation tries to make Clara aware of the facts of life and becomes her 'old man'. This play deals with
homosexuality, dependence upon wine as an escape, hoodlums from working class out to settle scores, and the middle class with a lack of perception. The middle class is represented by Jack, a young intellectual, who left the ghetto for the army, comes back to see his girl friend Clara. During his visit he is the butt of sarcastic remarks by Clara's friend Big Girl, who calls him "Mr smart and proper". Jack is later beaten up by the three punks. Far from being an occasion to show off his superiority, Jack's return to the ghetto becomes a rude test, a distressing confrontation with a world that now sees him as an intruder. Jack is surprised to learn that his education has cut him off from real life. Suspecting another man in Clara's life, he discovers too late that his rival is none other than Big Girl; he is no match for this opponent who has already exposed his weakness by leaving the ghetto. Jack has lost every hold on reality. When finally the truth dawns on him, he is taken out by the hoodlums to be thrashed. He fails to establish communication. His new values are of no help in the poor neighbourhoods of Philadelphia. Jack's path is irreversible: in denying his origins, he has betrayed himself. Through him, Bullins reiterates his accusation of the Black bourgeoisie, who never completely entered the dominant society, who were seduced only to be rejected, and who yet failed to recover their lost identity.
Clara can neither follow Jack nor get him back. Her life is in the hands of Big Girl. Big Girl is the kind of matronly figure who fills the roles of mother and provider. As both responsible mother and attentive lover, she protects Clara from the advances of vulgar suitors, corrects the education given by her overly religious parents and gives her a home shared by a retarded sister, Baby Girl and an invalid aunt. Thus Clara is virtually a prisoner of Big Girl and of her own weakness. However, she is ashamed of her homosexual relationship and Big Girl's coarseness. Clara stands as a symbol of reproach to the disorder, chaos and brutality. Big Girl teaches her 'mentally retarded teenager sister' to curse and fight. Both Big Girl and her sister Baby Girl were sent away from their mother because she had T.B. Big Girl was exposed to the disease which made her an invalid. Big Girl claims that Christianity was worse than that disease. it made her suffer:

... I spent years with those people, can you imagine ? A dozen years in hell. Christians ... haaa ... always preachin' bout some heaven
over yonder and building a bigger hell here
den any devil have imagination for. 27

As a revolt against all that was inculcated in her, Big Girl feels that
the only way out is by speaking out her mind, expressing her disgust
without any constraint:

You want to know how I got this way and been
this way most of my life and would be worse off
if you didn't let off steam some drinkin' this
rotgut and speaking my mind 28

Big Girl also ensures the survival of ghetto youth who seek refuge
when the police are on the trail. Initiator and educator, she teaches others
the lessons of life. She points out the rules to follow to make the best
things without pity for the young ambitious Jack who presumes to supplant
her. Big Girl does not intervene to spare him the roughing up she gets
from his former peers and thus shows that she places more hope in the
young hoodlums than in this member of the so called Black intelligentsia.
In Big Girl, Bullins creates one of the most important female figures in
Black theatre. The violence she uses to maintain order around her has neither the perversity nor the gratuitousness of some of her sisters in drama like the matron in *Ladies in Waiting*. Her essentially verbal violence helps Big Girl control people and things. She handles language with cruel dexterity, but she is not destructive. On the contrary, she harmonizes life. She intervenes to restore people to their right roles, to minimize risks and troubles. She is able to order the chaos she see in order to offer refuge to those feeling oppression. She gives a merciless analysis of the failures of psychology in the insane asylum of the white world symbolized by the hospital where she works. Big Girl teaches not only survival but how to live well: to have fun at the expense of others and oneself, to drink merrily and to repress sensuality, to speak plainly and openly. She organizes her life around several rituals which she controls with discretion. For her, if life is cruel, then it should not be boring. Destiny must be distracted. If need be defied.

It is in the speaking of her mind that she focuses on a contradictory truth that in the midst of this chaotic world and irrational sexuality she too is a symbol of order. She is in a sense the male leader of the household as Lance Jeffers asserts:
her distorted sexuality springs also from her compulsion to bring order out of chaos, her compulsion to be the steadying and dominating force in a world without a rudder, and to her mind only a male can play such a role.29

Bullins' drama brings together banal and simple situations such as the mortification-o-jack by Big Girl and his defeat by the hoodlums. Yet Bullins' main interest lies in a dialogue stamped with humour and tenderness. That combines all the modes of popular speech, from banter to defiance, from teasing to provocation. The narrative mode plays an important part in the characters' use of language. It serves to give necessary information and especially indicates the personality of the speaker.

Jack, with all his eloquence, is an "Uncle Tom" like figure. He tries to eulogise every act and situation:
That ritual action of purging and catharsis can open up new avenues of therapy and in learning theory and conditioning subjects you have an intuitive grasp of every abstract concept.\(^3^0\)

But with a little drink and provocation, his "words become slurred and mumbled." He is unable to hide his real self. This once again reflects the idea Lou expresses in *In The Wine Time* regarding the armed forces which are the instruments of whiteness to help black man choose nothingness and empty idleness over manhood.

Clara and Baby Girl with their incapacities reflect two similar aspects of a problem. Clara wants some one to talk to and Baby Girl wants some thing to play with.

I only wanted to talk Big girl. I only wanted to talk to some body. I don't have anybody to talk to ....\(^3^1\)
The cat! Cat! It's got some kittens! The cat got some Kittens!32

Both Clara and Baby Girl seek the impossible. Big Girl who is practical and takes the responsibility of earning for them refuses to allow any impractical venture of 'feeding another mouth'. She is both the mother and the father figure. She is a powerful order-bringer and a figure of realistic perception who deals with the world as she finds it.

Stoogie, Bama, and Itoss are characters who provide a backdrop to the play. Their actions project the atmosphere in which the play is set. Their violent entry and the chaotic justification shows their approach to life: "Yeah, we out to cool the war Lords now from ou'va on Powelton Avenue." They are the seeds of the new world, the anti-bourgeois world. They are carriers of an important form of black culture. They are encouraged by Big Girl when Stoogie says 'things just happen an' people talk and don' understand and get it all wrong, dat's all" Big Girl replies, "Yeah, all of it just happens, huh? It is just natural ... you's growin' boys." it is through this growth that they destroy the so-called innocence symbolised by Jack.
References:

   231-232.

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   231.

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