Chapter 3

Further Black Themes and Forms
Black experience depicted in the plays of Bullins presents a graphic account of Black life that transcends imitative stage realism. The characters in Bullins' plays have so much in common with their experience in real life that theatre realism is stretched to its furthest limits of believability leaving no scope for the suspension of disbelief. For writers like Howells and James the word "real" almost always implied a dialectic whose unstated opposite half is "ideal". Howells also insists on dealing with questions of vital interest naturally and honestly. Bullins constructs plays around problems that seek solution in the conscience of the spectator. The plays provoke an outlook for the future rather than the immediate present. As the characters of realistic plays are derived from "real life", the representations should be structured by the rhythms derived from an 'objectively' observed flow of the events themselves. The diction and dialogue too of the characters do nothing to destroy the illusion that the audience are hearing human beings in everyday life. Bullins traces a dramatic growth as he moves from realism/naturalism to avant garde drama.
Working both as a director, playwright of the New Lafayette Theater and also as a writer seriously committed to the "altering" of the Black consciousness and evoking a black aesthetic, Bullins brings about an artistic synthesis of the folk and formal traditions. To create a theatre of realistic form, however different from the traditional concept of realism, he draws from the oral tradition of Afro-American culture to depict the trickster and bad nigger types. He infuses them with the life blood characteristics of the fearless, sensitive, urban dudes. In spite of writing in the sixties and seventies, Bullins' major plays give us a theatre of Black experience with traditional dramatic unities. His plays are the essence of good drama, spectacle, action, and tightly constructed plot, but from a distinctly Black perspective. Perhaps this is a perfect combination of tradition and individual talent.

In Bullins' plays the audience is forced to confront reality and not escape it with the help of a manufactured fantasy. He terms his plays tragic-fantasy, showing how even fantasy is tragic. Fantasy defined in simple terms is imagination, especially when freely creative. The element of tragedy in the experience of an Afro-American reaches to the extent of the sub-conscious. Therefore, even in moments of free creativity tragedy is inevitable.
Bullins is often accused of having a negative approach to various situations as he presents negative images of Afro-Americans. His characters drift through life not merely using but also abusing each other. The unerring honesty of his realistic style makes it impossible to hide or even partially obscure the ugliness and the activities of the characters which makes the reader or the audience uncomfortable.

His style of writing cannot be firmly defined and placed under a single category as he moves from realism to expressionism. Like a Jazz musician he constantly changes and moulds his meter. Seemingly simple and straight realism is constantly interrupted with drifts into passionate prose and poetry as in The Duplex.

Most of the Afro-American writing in the past decade or two can be termed as "literature engagee." Hence, form is relegated to a secondary position as thought and message become significant. Bullins' theatre is a theatre with a purpose. Bullins as a writer can be better understood when his works are looked at not in a chronological order but in a framework of evolving themes.

Ed Bullins abandons melodrama altogether in The Duplex: A Black Love Fable dramatized in four movements. This is a continuation of the
variations on his major theme, the cycle of love. The action takes place in California during the sixties. The title The Duplex indicates a specific space but also states that the action unfolds on two levels. This is suggestive, not realistic. Two superimposed stages are each divided into several playing areas. Each room belonging to a character or a couple, is both an autonomous. There is a private space where dramas and secret loves occur and further a space penetrated by the outer world in the constant flow of visitors, friends and trouble makers. Doors and stairways offer passage from one unit to the next and the possibility of many interactions. In this shadowy areas one hears approaching foot steps or waits with anxiety. Yet each face is guilt-laden.

The complex stage directions suggest a world enclosed and cultured with objects. The colours are garish. The overwhelming decorations give the impression of baroque unreality, as if they had come from "the more imaginative innates of an institution for the insane". This set suggests an atmosphere of mystery and voluptuousness. The spatial organisation of the set is a part of the play's text. The entire action unfolds within these walls and the street appears indirectly. The complexity of this space structures both the relations among the characters and the action. On one floor live the tenants, Steve and Marco; on the other Velma, the beautiful land-lady whose rowdy husband makes his presence known by noisy entrances and exits.
Velma is attracted to Steve and their affair risks being discovered at any moment by the unexpected return of the terrifying husband.

The Duplex is the space in which the two characters search for each other and are afraid of getting caught. This is a space invested with dramatic value, for each movement creates suspense.

Bullins' description of this space serves both practical and poetic purposes. At times it gives precise directions for the performance, at times it helps to create the imaginary. It also stands for the relations and underlying conflicts in society. Finally it is a planning area or an autonomous space "Where something happens on its own terms". The game is Velma's seduction of Steve. The land-lady can move about with more ease than her tenant, She is bolder than the young one who fears reprisals and often hides to escape Velma's attentions. The upstairs area is like an observation post from which Velma seems to direct a situation in which emotions are acted out.

The spectator occupies a privileged position, for he can see all levels and units at once. He knows who is going up or down the stairs and who is keeping watch on whom. He guesses before the protagonists can feel what will happen and his surprise comes before theirs. The dramatic interest thus
rebounds, for the action plays upon the difference between the spectators' perspective and that of characters separated by doors and walls.

Once again, like in *Goin' a Buffalo*, this play too begins with a game. Macro, Tootsie, Franklin and Montgomery Henderson sit around the table playing cards. Even as the others join them the game continues. This cursing, drinking, playing, and fornicating people seems to have created a world of its own. Basically each individual is preoccupied with his own idea of life and happiness. Yet they all wear a garb of concern for the others. Between the individual and society lies a world of compromise, resignation and even indifference.

I don't bother me none if'n she has drm kinds an blames dem on me kids need some body for 'dere fatha ... heee, hee, and the welfare people downtown don't care who take the blame. The don't even bother me too much. Whenever they get me I jest say I'm out of work or claim bankruptcy.1

The game changes when Velma arrives. The jokes start alluding to sex in which each man is seducer. Velma handles their advances with good humour but loses no time in taking Steve away. During the first days of her
marriage Velma was happy. But now that O.D. has taken to the street, she tries to bring Steve into her domain, the duplex. But O.D.'s frequent intrusions threaten the peaceful heaven and it is Velma who must seek Steve's protection. Like Art in Goin' a Buffalo, Steve plans the knight who comes to the aid of a mistreated woman but his eagerness makes O.D. suspicious and creates another danger. Velma who thinks she is strong and independent is really a fragile woman who fears solitude and needs her vulgar and rough husband's love as much as Steve's tenderness. She continues to drift between the two men and the Sways of her follow those of her body from one floor to the other. The gun she and Steve agree to buy does not help to resolve the conflict. When the confrontation occurs, physical force wins and O.D. takes possession of his wife. The verbal exchanges that went with the card game are repeated in the more brutal game in which the adversaries lay hold of each other. The last scene makes the threat concrete. In Velma's world the force of love should be shown by strength of fists.

As in Bullins' other plays, the neighbours play an important role in this play. Their visits punctuate the plot and even when they are not on stage, they are always ready to intervene. They keep watch and lend Velma a helping hand. When it is time for the party, they rush into dance and drink wine and they participate in the two step between Velma and Steve. They
also hope to seduce some one. Their hopes and dreams mingle with those of the main trio. Their discourse complements that of the protagonists. The charms of neighbours does not come out of now, where the spectator is supposed to recognize them from other plays.

Bullins encourages us to find parallels between characters and situations in his various plays. He also constantly inserts references within the body of his work, thus presenting the "20th century cycle" as a single text whose different episodes become mutually clarified. The different plays are variations on the same arguments and explorations. The later plays refer back to the earlier ones. Steve's monologue in *The Duplex* responds to Ray's long narrative in *In The Wine Time* and by picking up Ray's tale, Steve suddenly finds his own voice.

Steve : You don't know me ... Nobody knows me ... What's in my mind and guts .... how my breath stops in my throat and chokes me when I hear my woman call out at night .... call out to me.

Marco : She's not your woman, Idiot!

Steve : No body knows the love and beauty. I find in holding my woman in my arms ... My woman ... a poor little scared black girl that's even
dumber than I'm supposed to be. Nobody knows that I don't care if she has kinds ... children who will hate me for ever if I get her like I plan. Nor will any body know that she will never know me ... really know me ... this black man ... with this mind ... they will never understand the thoughts that flash through my head and scorch the back of my eyes ... these eyes that see her being beaten and raped, these eyes that see the flames of the hell that we all live in ... live our black lives in here ... in our cool dark little lives ... getting ready to become something we ain't now or will never be ... really.

Steve's speech is not simply that of Velma's lover but that of any "Nigger" whether he is called Ray, Cliff, or Steve. The reference is no longer to the autonomous universe of each play or to the ensemble but to the condition of Blacks he seems to belong to. Each character has a destiny that becomes exemplary and metaphorical. Steve's discourse goes from the cry of a blues song, voicing his solitude and his love. Thus the distress of the
black condition is expressed through individual voices and through that of the entire community.

Set during the early sixties in a duplex in southern California, The Duplex tells the story of Velma's search for self-completeness and for a love that transcends sex. To understand better the search for self-completeness, we might turn to an incident in the Amos Tutuola novel, The Palm - Wine Drinkard. A Nigerian lady, searching for a 'complete gentleman', warned repeatedly not to interest herself in this stranger to the village, nevertheless decides that he completes her being. She sees him one day in the market place and decides to follow him to the forest. She sees him "return the hired parts of his body to the owners", until the complete gentleman is reduced to a head. She senses danger but follows still, until she is captured by the gentleman and his community of the skulls.

In his plays, Bullins continually portrays this search through Jack and Clara in Clara's Ole man (1959) Cliff and Lou Dawson in In The Wine Time (1966), Steve and Grace in It Has No Choice (1966), and Steve and Liz in New England Winter (1967). In Duplex, Bullins elects to make the "an careerah an stayin' in the streets". He comes home to change his clothes and eat and then try and get (Velma) in bed. Consequently Velma turns her search towards Steve Benson, the guy from upstairs: "Steve, be mah friend."
Please be mah friend." But Steve is interested primarily in getting his college degree, his one way ticket from the confines of the duplex. After considerable vacillation about his feelings for Velma, Steve discovers that he loves Velma, faults and all:

Nobody knows the love and beauty. I find in holding my woman in my arms ... my woman ... a poor little scared black girl that's even dumber than I'm supposed to be. Nobody knows that I don't care if she has kids ... children who will hate. Me forever if I get her like I plan. Nor will anybody know that she will never known me ... really ... know me ... This black man ... with his mind. They'll never understand the thoughts that flash through my head and scorch the back of my eyes ... These eyes that see her being beatened and raped ... These eyes ... that see the flames of the hell that we all live in ... live our black lives in here in our cool dark little lives ... getting ready to become something we ain't now or will ever be ... really.
But Steve's discovery is too late. Velma decides that Steve's vacillation (the stripping to the skull) proves that he is not her "her half," that she must save her mismatched marriage to O.D. who decides that his "other half" is another woman. Several other fruitless searches in and around the duplex elaborate the main action.

Marked by a flowing conversational style, Duplex relies on two structural devices to create mood and to transport its unifying idea: (a) unplanned and casual action, and (b) frequently disconnected dialogue. Also there is very little developed action in the play. The characters continually drink, play, cut-throat pinochle, signify, dance and screw. O.D. and his watchdog crook enter periodically to knock a few heads together - to interrupt, in other words, this systematic combination of exposition and casual action.

We receive considerable information about their pasts, their hopes and their fears. The search for structure then must focus not on the development of action, but on the development of the theme, the recurrence of hopes for self-completeness. These hopes are gradually exposed as illusions and are later shattered. Bullins' structural pattern exposes dissatisfaction with reality. It enables a flight into fantasy.

The characters frequently do not respond to each other. Each spins his own yarn to the others who are far more interested in spinning their own.
Velma : You know ... This is the only real home i've had.

Mamma : When I ment pops he thought he'd standup on his rear legs ... yes, indeed he did.

Velma : First time I ever sunk roots this deep.

Sukie : I had an ole nigger man once thought he was bad.

Mamma : Called himself "Dawg" then ... least wise that's what his no-count friends used to call him not so long ago neither.

Velma : Even when I was back home ... that wasn't like home ... really that was just my mamma and daddy's place. I just lived there.

Sukie : I told that man. "Nigger! If you ever look at me funny, you gonna be sorry ... you gonna be sorry for the ... day you was born." Yeah that's what I told that nigger.\(^4\)

Contrary to Kerr's suggestion that disconnected conversation impairs the play, the desultory dialogue highlights the casual action and points to the desperation of the search for self-completeness. In *Duplex*, Bullins also
leaves several subjects unechoed. "In his anxiety to record honestly and fully his sense of the sound of Blackness (Bullins) is at this stage in his career wildly unselective. He is willing to let the most desultory of conversations go on into infinity so long as he feels he is telling the truth."

Bullins selects and arranges his scenes so that they resemble the search itself: looking, finding, testing, detesting, researching. Each character's search "is examined at length", as Kerr points out. His complaint that the characters are "independent entities," that they "spin off into space without having made vital connection" is the very strength of the play. This is in fact the successful meshing of form and content.

Near the end, Steve finally fights O.D. for Velma: Seeing O.D., "Steve walks towards him. O.D.'s face is blank, but at the last moment he smiles slightly, before Steve punches him squarely in the face with all his might". But O.D. recovers, slams Steve against the wall, butts him, grabs him like a rag doll, and strangles him. When O.D. finally lets him loose, Steve struggles upstairs and threatens: "Next time .... I'll do it the right way". But there will be no next time. His friend, Lootsie, reminds him: "Man .... that women's wit her ole man ... can't you understand. That ?" We know that Steve's and Velma's future is to live and learn to accept their altered reality. The play and the
search end and begin anew with Steve's friends arriving and yelling." Hey evvobody! Grab yo cards, whiskey 'n women, it is party time!

Kerr's inability or refusal to accept Bullins' successful use of certain structural innovations - The same ones that he praises about in non-black drama - points to something else behind his arguments about structure. Typical of non-Black critics, Kerr is not really all that concerned about the shape of Black drama, and the shape of ideas, attitudes and practices in Black drama.

Bullins uses the ritual of the blues as a vehicle for reaching the masses of Black folk. The plot structures and other characteristics of conventional western drama are absent. Bullins' plots and structures are parallel to the experiences that he portrays. Many consider him a pioneer, creating new forms to project a Black experience and expression. As the plot structures and other characteristics of conventional western drama are absent, the plays hold together a unity in theme. A consistent theme moves the audience. His plays are stamped with the feeling of immediacy.

While reading his plays, one is aware of Bullins' capacities as a playwright, director, and his know-how of stage productions. The sudden metamorphoses that often take place in his plays both in action and music
are plotted. The emphasis is not on any rules of dramatic unity and structure but the ability to communicate with the audience. If in some of his plays there is a meek acceptance of all that is real and his plays turn out to be "chronicles of the losers, the weak and the sick," his revolutionary plays fight just that reality and recreate a new reality through a process of altering consciousness. Thus his theatre becomes not merely a theatre of realism bordering on naturalism, but as Bullins defines it, a "theatre of reality."

In plays like *The Duplex, Goin' a Buffalo* and *In the Wine Time*, he seems to intentionally avoid the quasi-scientific methodology inherent in traditional naturalism. His plays are designed to be more inductive than deductive. There are no preconceived conclusions that are explained and justified. Obviously there seems to be no effort to write a well made play.

Bullins' technique is to allow his characters to speak for themselves revealing to each other and to the audience their own views. Thus the presence of the author is hardly felt. Speech and action seem to follow a natural course, though not through a "naturalistic" style.

Bullins moved from a personal mode of writing in the form of essays and stories to a public genre, the theatre. If his essays and stories vary in style from simple narratives to highly metaphorical presentations, his plays,
without conforming to the rigid norm of different "isms", use various elements of realism, naturalism, and expressionism to produce an effective mode of communication. He diversifies the collection *The Hundred One* by writing in an almost personal voice and he apparently reaches back into his own experiences and then seems to present to us his various experiences in a quiet candor that breaks into the solitude of the reader. Thus the autobiographical element in tone and theme cannot be ignored. These essays are revelations about the early intellectual career of Bullins wherein there is an uncommon diversity and experimentation with different narrative forms. In *The Hungered One* there is an arresting morbidity which is an assertion of Bullin's literary imagination. In the essays like *The Hungered One* and *The Drive*, we see Bullins' skill of keenly watching and experiencing life around only to use these realistic observations in an exceedingly economic and lucid style of writing. Some of his narratives, with even macabre themes, were adopted as plays showing a cyclic process of his works in general. After writing plays like *The Duplex*, and *Goin' a Buffalo*, Bullins shaped some of his essays into a play, for instance *Dialect Determinism* and *In the Wine Time*. Thus if Bullins essays are a recollection of and a reflection upon life, his plays are a representation and a recreation of life itself.
In the short play, *The Helper*, Bullins emphasises the non-realistic situation in a revolutionary society, suggesting perhaps the impermanence of the 'nonrealistic' state of both the character and the setting. The harmonious existence of the White and Black characters, the docile and passive helper who is a Black, are all part of the non-realistic picture. The Helper, in spite of the inability to feel or react, shows signs of self-respect and dignity in the process of the work that he undertakes. For the white world represented by the Mother, the Helper has:

The most marvellous skin ... so ...

So dark and rich ... so ...

African.⁵

When she wishes that more of their help was like him, Daddy a representative of the Blacks:

(Looks balefully at his family) Awww ...

If you kids want to think that ...."

(Daddy spit on the floor).⁶

This incomplete sentence at the end of the play followed by a much revealing act suggests the impending change that would be realistic. "A Minor
Scene', as the name suggests, is a realistic presentation of an incident wherein there are only two characters, Peter Black and Miss Ann. Peter Black, a conscientious Black man encounters Ann with a blunt and a straightforward question "Hey, you white scummy-lookin bourgeois bitch, take me to dinner?"

He shocks her sensibilities using the kind of language he does. But Ann is unable to retain the garb of sophistication either. Peter's use of obscene language is resented only as a pretence which could not last long. Ann accepts Peter's invitation without any protest.

A significantly longer play The Corner is divided into four sub-heads. The scene is set in a street corner where all Black young men, Cliff, Bummice, Slick, Stella, Wille Clark, Blue, and Silly, meet just to drink and fornicate. But they are constantly nagged by the fear of the police. Cliff, the leader figure, is metaphorically at the cross roads. He can no longer go on with the same lifestyle. He chooses to change, a change brought about by the fact that he would be a father soon. He is a father figure who cannot indulge himself any further in meaningless existence.

Moving a little further, Bullins shifts from the stage and theatre to the popular means of reaching out to people through television, an indication of
the post-Guttenberg era. Bullins wrote Black commercials for use as short, low budget films on T.V. These commercials used as a tool for revelational mass communication signify the commitment of the Black artist and his emphasis on the 'theme' as a dramatic element. These one act plays and commercials with thematic significance are sources for awakening consciousness through a process of self-searching. A Blackman in any part of the world is a victim of dual consciousness and the other consciousness colonised by the whites. The longer plays that follow not only present this predicament but also present a way out, by awakening the black-African consciousness of the Blacks.

In the *Four Dynamite Plays* (1972) as the name suggests Bullins blasts both the theme and the structure of the plays. His idea of changing the outlook not only of the Blacks but also of the whites is strengthened in the first play, *It Bees Dat way*. He calls the play a 'ritual' to be give nice location that is frequented by a white audience. The actors are not clearly marked from the audience. The actors who are all Black, play stereotypical roles.

Jackie is drunk, Poppy is a junkie needing money for drugs, OUTLAW has made a career from mugging white people. TRIGGER does any thing in the way of violence, mostly helping OUTLAW, CORNY is a
quarreler and semi-drunk street person and Sister will get into any thing where she thinks SHE might score some cash.\textsuperscript{7}

Once again the street culture scenario is enlivened and the Black man asserts himself. Although he is portrayed in the manner of a typical street junk he tries to be different. His behaviour is 'most unlikely and threatening'. In the process of the dialogue, the white man's reactions are left to the imagination of the reader or the audience themselves. The technique involved is more or less a kind of dramatic monologue. The psyche of the Black man and his understanding of the situation work themselves out. Comly, in spite of his quarrelsome personality, sees reason even in the behaviour of the cops.

You think you bad. Got a gun and all that shit. You out here shootin' the cops. Well the cops ain't made dis shit.\textsuperscript{8}

Cops ain't the ones to shoot ... niggers ... only if they git your way. Dese here people ain't the ones to get ... they ain't got nothin' ... Just like you and me ... they
just work for them that made did mers ... the onesto
shoot is who what made this mess. 

"This mess" that the Blacks have been placed in has caused the death of their real self. What they are today is what the whites want them to be or what the whites don't want them to be. Thus in the process of being moulded by the white world, Bullins in It Bees Dat Way presents the predicament of the Blacks:

Is Death any worse than this Brothers ... can they kill us any more than they have already.

and yet they find themselves alive 'I'M STILL ALIVE !!!'

The Black man who is alive, alive to realise the predicament he is forced into and becomes aware of the conflict within, attempts to kill all those who made "This mess". In the next play Dealth List there are only two representative characters, Black man and Black woman. Through these characters Bullins shows an awareness and sympathy towards the struggle of the Blacks in other parts of the world. This play is "Dedicated to The Palestine National Liberation Movement (Al-Fatah) and its striking military wing (Al Assifa Forces) acting in occupied Palestine". Black man identifies
himself with the oppressed elsewhere irrespective of the colour. Blackman is "cleaning a high powered rifle with telescope sight" and simultaneously naming all those who would be his target in his venture. He seems to have chosen people from different professions who he thinks have become the "Enemy of the Black People." The realisation of the generation gap and an effort to understand the follies of the other generation is projected through Black woman. Only a conflict is presented where the two argue putting forth their views which seems proper to both. Blackman's persistent views that he wants to erase the image of every Blackman who has become an enemy of the Blacks from the living reality of the Black people is encountered by Black woman's questioning, "is this act we can end with ? Death ? The killing of our elders and the training of our youth to be murderers. Is there not another way ?" Unmoved by her reason Blackman further asserts his intentions saying "And today reality demands that I destroy you and your kind Mr. Robinson."

But Black woman tries to see in every Black man a sense of brotherhood. Irrespective of the idiosyncracies, the uniting force according to her is the Blackness itself. In these times of crises the only concern should be survival. In spite of all the admonishing, Black man leaves Black woman behind. He seems to have no ears, words or mind for her. Yet Black woman sends him off on a hopeful note:
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.11

As Black man leaves we hear sounds outside that of "gun fire and
scream" and 'a single shot'. This could be an indication of the death of the
Black man who has become a threat to the very existence of Blackness.

After the shot is heard the play ends on a note of 'BLACKNESS'. If blackness
suggests hope, the Manichean dualism that blackness is evil and whiteness
is good is reversed.

Another play in this collection, Night of the Beast, is 'A Screen Play', a
further innovation from mere theatre to a screenplay. It shows the Black
dramatists' urge to reach out to the masses. Thematically once again the
incongruity amongst the Blacks themselves is perceived here which arises
as a result of the Christian indoctrination, that arouses a feeling of
brotherhood and the revolutionary fervour that causes the death of the
individual. This conflict widens the gap between the two states of
consciousness. However, there is a sense of 'tragic optimism amongst the
characters. The events in Ed Bullins' Night of the Beast take place at a time
when Nixon was in power in America. It was June 1969. Nixon followed a
policy of repression against the Black revolution. There is a fight for equality in the play. Nixon appears on a Television screen in the play and orders revolutionaries to be carried to concentration camps and exterminated. The white power structure under Nixon uses the police force against the revolutionaries. The cops that appear in Bullins’ play are all Black. Even tanks and helicopters are sent to counter the force of the organised blacks. The open war takes place in the streets of Harlem. A Bar serves as the retreat of the revolutionaries. In the beginning, Brother, a character in the play, takes refuge in the Bar to escape the bullets from the exterminators - the blacks sent by whites to kill the revolutionaries. He descends into a cellar, and in the darkness, kills a Black revolutionary, Jamal, following a fight between the two. Jamal’s sister, called Girl, goes insane witnessing the scene. When the leader comes to this retreat, he questions Brother about the self-defence. Brother, who has been keeping away for the last few days shut inside his room, learns about the revolution and decides to join the fight. Leader, Brother and Sister (Jamal’s wife) form the main powers of the revolutionaries. As Brother and Sister smoke marijuana the scene shifts to the unrealistic setting of the third world war. Here all are Brothers and Sisters. They have dance, health drinks, and songs. Finally, two black cops, one of them in a white Devil’s mask, enter with drawn guns. A character called Speaker works magic on them uttering some strange words and turns them into pigs. The crowd charges and kills them. But Speaker orders the
crowd to turn to the streets where the real war is in progress. The scene now shifts to the realistic setting of the fight between the revolutionaries and the exterminators. The insane girl finally kills Bother and thus takes revenge upon her brother’s murderer. But Sister kills her. The play ends with a close-up of the headline of "Muhammed Speaks" newspaper dated June 13th 1969, which announces "AMERICA IS FALLING". The Blacks do not attain complete victory. But they prepare for the next attack.

The concern of Bullins in the play, is with the present. He portrays a society in transition - a society passing through revolutionary times.

In Bullins' play we find people being called to make adjustment with their life style and outlook during moment of emergency. Brother has been staying in his room for days together listening to records, reading and sleeping and thus cutting himself away from the noisy Harlem streets. When he comes out, he is caught by the revolutionary for accidentally killing Jamal, and he learns about the war that is going on. Leaders tell him every thing about the war and how it started at Harlem university when the Blacks who held a rally were shot by the police. When Brother learns about the emergency of the situation, he joins the revolutionaries "Yeah ... I'll fight for my people. Any time."
In Bullins' play, the direct fight is between the black revolutionaries and the exterminators or what Leader calls "White man's niggers." These Black cops referred to as pigs, appear in white cars with large American flags. This is symbolic. The exterminations have the backing of the White American Government.

Bullins brings out the spiritual tie that exists between revolutionaries and their enemies. Sister checks Brother from shooting a fallen Black cop. She sees him as a brother who has been led astray by the white man. It is for the revolutionaries to forgive him. Brother asks her "If he was so Black, why was he tryin' to kill me for, huh? He is supposed to be mah brother." She replies "we must try and understand them. We must try and help our brothers that don't understand". But such spiritual bond is never acknowledged.

In the play two Black cops who enter the Bar are turned into pigs by Speaker. The crowd charges and kills them with chairs and broken bottles and each shares the trophy - an ear, a tail or a foot. This is the dream that the revolutionaries want to realize. Bullins' revolutionaries use a language that is peculiar to them, addressing one another as "Brother" and "Sister". Compared to the ghetto dwellers pictured in many of his plays who spend their time fornicating, drinking, and cursing one another in filthy language, Bullins gives his revolutionaries a more dignified and refined language. In the
present play the revolutionaries use even drums to convey secret message to outwit the white man. Sister tells Brother:

Yes, brother, the revolutionaries knew that the white man would take long time to decode our messages that we sound over our drums. By then the information is worthless to him ... we also have learned to speak in some of the tongues of our mother land, Africa ... All Black people, everywhere should learn and know these languages.¹⁴

In this wide range of short and long plays of Bullins the characters, in spite of the realisation of their suffocating environment, make an attempt to create a world of their own altering the slavish, assimilating consciousness. The sense of failure shapes itself out. Pimps, whores, hustlers and dropouts in Bullins' plays are not mere pathological misfits, but simple common people on the street whose pathetic existence opens up vistas of insight into the human condition. They are occasionally even led to participate in a heroic deed. Their lifestyles and actions heighten a collective consciousness. This conscious self-awareness is promoted by Bullins in the theatre.
Thus if negritude is a form of affirming and altering black consciousness, the assertion of black consciousness is presented in the form of realistic plays that evoke an unrealized aspiration. The word "real" almost always implies a dialectic whose unstated opposite is "ideal". So Bullins' plays do shift from the 'realistic' to the 'idealistic'. The two terms however are defined in the context of black experience and revolt. Le Roi Jones asserts in *The Revolutionary Theatre* that the purpose of such theatre is to teach white people their death and Bullins has done just that, in his *Four Dynamite Plays* and the commercials written for television. The major means of communication to Black people in America is through the Black Art Alliance whose aim was to implement a Black communications project. A complete nonchalant attitude towards the mainstream acceptance is characteristic of Bullins' plays. The spirit of his works is somewhat "alien to the white liberal conscience". Toni Cade Bambara states:

The play-wright need not any longer accommodate his vision to what the white conscience believes is the truth about this country, its past, its people, and their relationships. There is an undercurrent of pedagogy, sometimes called radicalism, that feels obliged to bomb blacks out of their corners, smoke whites out of hiding, and flush the shit out of the system.¹⁵
The internal conflict of the blacks is propelled by using primarily colloquial speech patterns whose flexibility suggests the nuances of emotion, exposes the double standards of the white society, and seriously questions the assumptions of the dominant white social and moral codes. Thus Bullins' drama emerges from the cruel social reality around tinged with an idealistic longing for a better world.
References: