Chapter 4

CONCLUSION
Over the years there has been a rediscovery of the Black consciousness in terms of the Black people in the African Diaspora. Africans from various parts of Africa with varied tribal cultures, when brought together, could feel the absence of a central tradition. This fragmentary nature of their experience and expression forced them to find a new set of values. The Blackness of America merged with the Blackness of the world around to evolve into a new world in itself. Thus abandoning their partial frame of reference which included oppression and rebellion, they created new concepts.

Bullins comes from a culture of oppression. But he reaches a point where he creates a new cultural status manifesting itself in theatre forms, wherein there are cross-winds in different aspects like colour, sense of alienation, rootlessness, awareness, assertion, affirmation, and even revolt. There is in Bullins a schismatic consciousness as he is caught between the two worlds of different cultures - one of the African sensibility and the other of the American
reality. 'The Theme is Blackness', depicts various experiences and the fragmentary awareness of the Black self. Bullins is committed to a certain cause, a cause of educating and enlightening the Black youth. Therefore, he even wrote commercials for television.

Various characters of Bullins seem to encounter reality at different levels: the reality of the Caribbean and American set up and the reality of the African consciousness. These bring together the historical, socio-political situations. Bullins highlights the African sensibility without ignoring the American experience through Jazz and the Blues. The characters on stage seem to perform a realistic situation on an atmosphere of illusion, dream, and fantasy. Even in the failure of these leaders, there is a sense of grandeur and dignity. For Bullins, the collective consciousness presented through individual leaders is but one of the issues. He is basically concerned with the working middle class majority. His concern is expressed through the multitudes from street life. The awakening of Black consciousness in the early twentieth century is a result of the realization of the relegated status of a black man in spite of his efforts to assimilate and absorb an alien culture. This leads to an affirmation of Black consciousness.
When this failed to be accepted and accorded its due position, it further leads to the altering of consciousness resulting in a revolt, at times even violent, with the hope of affirming a reality and altering reality so as to create an acceptable new reality.

Bullins draws heavily from the unwritten history, the present personal experience and is concerned with the here and now. Thus he furthers the existential dilemma of being Black in a White society. He has to come to terms not with an independent state, but an independent black self. Bullins moves from the general to the particular and arrives at the idea of African sensibility. The combination of the tragic and the comic in Bullins revives the dialectics of the African community in the Diaspora. Bullins present the stark and ugly reality of humanity in general and the black community in particular. In this he confronts every individual’s sense of reality and evokes both the individual and the collective consciousness. Consciousness which is both essence and experience can be reached not merely through action but through metaphoric and symbolic action. The themes of various plays set in motion a certain action. However, it is only the characters who
symbolize a certain thought process and become embodiments of the intuitive and insubstantial aspect of life. They concretize the abstract notions of awareness, assertion and revolt through the very language of the oppressor.

In Bullins' altering consciousness, one finds a movement towards black ethics, black morality, black language, and finally the new black reality. If ethics and morality are shaped in an effort to survive in an all white world of deceptive values, language is but a mode of communication and expression of thought in the limited circle of the Black World. Bullins uses in most of his works, graphic presentations of naturalistic detail, which break through the "frozen imagery of social realism." The protagonist and the antagonist seem to work under an invincible force of social, political and economic power that has a deadly grip on their being.

Many of Bullins' plays were written for 'The New Lafayette Theatre' because he has worked as a writer to build one of the finest Black community institutions of its kind in the world. This theatre has inspired and sustained him as an artist. The association of a
practising body of Black artists has had an untold influence upon his work. His work and The New Lafayette's cannot be exactly separated or identified. There is no other place, to his knowledge, where a collective entity of Black artistic knowledge, talent, craft, experience and commitment exists.

Dramatic interpretation of the Black experience depicted in the plays of Bullins presents a graphic depiction of Black life that transcends the imitative stage realism. The characters in his plays have so much in common with their experience in real life that theatre realism is stretched to its farthest limits. Bullins constructs plays around problems that seek solution in the conscience of the spectator 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.

Bullins, working both as a director, playwright of New Lafayette Theatre and also as a writer, seriously committed to the "altering" of the Black consciousness and evoking a black aesthetic brings about
an artistic synthesis of the folk and formal traditions. To create a theatre of realistic form, however different from traditional concept of realism, he draws from the oral tradition of Afro-American culture to depict the trickster and bad nigger types and infuses them with the life blood literary characters who are fearless, sensitive urban dudes. In spite of writing in the sixties and seventies, his 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, however from a distinctly Black perspective.

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 tragi-fantasy, showing how even fantasy is tragic. Fantasy defined in simple term is "imaginative, 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. While portraying the "realities and contradictions" of the Afro-Americans, Bullins uses the motif of the Blues. Blues are also defined as tragi-fantasy in that the stylized
exaggeration and the black suffering together form a paradoxical combination of the real and the unreal.

Thus, through its "incongruous humor" it becomes a way of ritualizing their suffering from an ironic distance so as to avoid the trap of self-pity and martyrdom. Bullins has artistically integrated his revolutionary messages with his tragi-comic "lyricism". His plays are an extended form of blues and not mere philosophical formulations like existentialism. He re-examines the brutal Black experience and projects it through a process of reuniting the natural existence and the cosmic consciousness of the past.

The emphasis in a Bullins' play is not on any rules of dramatic unity and structure, but on the ability to communicate with the audience. Bullins uses the ritual of the blues as a vehicle for reaching the masses of the Black folk. The plot structures and other characteristics of western drama are absent. Bullins' plot 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 are absent, the plays hold together a unity in theme.

Baraka terms Black drama "the theatre of victims". Bullins' victims do not die but are caught in the dilemma of their awareness of "wasted individuality" and newly acquired self-identity. The "dialectical apprehension of reality" results in an art form that is didactic and visionary, yet committed to a kind of social realism.

The future of Black theatre according to Bullins:

"will be in its evolution into a profound instrument of altering the slave mentality of Black Americans. In an evil white world of evershifting values and reality, for the Black man there must be a sanctuary for re-creation of the Black spirit and African identity. Black theatre is not a Theatre of the Lip as is the style of Black/White hustling America, but a people's theatre, dedicated to the continuous survival of the Black people. And the artists will continue to evolve with the people, swim within their mass and emerge through
creation after creation. For we know "The dogs may
bark, but the Caravan passes on."

The systemic disorder and chaos that is initially evident in the works
of the writer evolves into an order to form a pattern of consciousness
that moves from awakening to affirmation and alteration. In the
process of evolving consciousness and passing through the stages of
asserting consciousness and altering consciousness, Bullins' theatre
has become a visible force in the cultural life of Black America.

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