

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Summer Dream and the Collective Notion of Identity in Ed Bullins's *In the Wine Time*

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Abstract

This article argues that Ed Bullins's play *In the Wine Time* (1968) presents collective existential *black consciousness*. The play showcases a collective struggle against the oppressive reality through depicting a realistic image of the depressing life of the blacks in the black ghetto. This stems from the idea that Black existential philosophy and Black existential drama present a *collective* notion of existence rather than the individualistic notion of existence presented by traditional, European existentialism. Bullins builds this notion among his characters throughout the scenes of the play. To this end, the play characterizes a dialogue between the individualistic level of existence and the collective one through calling on for improving the oppressive reality through choice and opportunity. The collective struggle the play shows throughout the performance intends to free the black individual, as freeing the black individual is the first step toward achieving the collective freedom.

Keywords: collective consciousness, black drama, black existentialism, Ed Bullins, *In the Wine Time*

1- Introduction and Review of Related Literature

The Black Theater Movement witnessed an expansion and a shift in the ideological trajectory it adopted during the 1960s and 1970s. As this period was affected by its sister movements—the Black Power Movement and the Civil Rights Movement—the Black Arts Movement in this period comprised two major ideological trends: (1) the trend that addressed black *consciousness*, a black revolt, and a black aesthetic expression and (2) the trend that tended to present Blackness as a fate that befell certain people in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, this latter trend addressed the blacks' problem and experience in relation to white oppression. On the other hand, the first trend considered Blackness as “a viable ideology” (Williams, 1985, pp. 154-155) and tends to experiment in the medium of Black theater and in addressing the concept of Blackness. It addresses new *consciousness*. It dashes forward toward a move from militant *consciousness* to *collective* socio-political aesthetic consciousness and identity.

The African American playwright Ed Bullins is one of the iconic representatives of Black theater in this transformative period. One of the important issues that make Bullins a monumental figure is his experimentation in Black theater, which helped the advancement of the concept of Black drama as a

medium that has fused both political dimensions and aesthetic expressions. In “A Literary Gangster from Those Primitive Times of the Twentieth Century,” Mike Sell (2006) highlights the importance of Ed Bullins in challenging the traditional Black drama and in advancing Black theater as an avant-gardist. Sell argues that Bullins,

helped develop (with Amiri Braka and Ben Caldwell) one new genre, the revolutionary commercial, and invented another all by himself, what I would call the ‘agitprop closet drama,’ a form of political theater that deconstructs the lines between theatrical representation and insurrectionary action, art, as utilitarian means and art as end in itself. (2006, p. 1)

On the other hand, some critics find Bullins’s theatrical quest to be, to some extent, contradictory as it combines both the notion of revolutionary purpose and the aesthetic theatrical representation. Peter Bruck (1981) justifies this “contradiction” by linking Bullins with Alain Locke who called for folk plays to celebrate black culture and create *black consciousness* beyond the agitating purpose of the Du Boisian kind of drama. Bruck argues that Bullins has tried to show the black experience in a totality that fuses multiple dimensions together (Bruck, 1981, pp. 126-27). In fact, this fusion presented in Bullins’s theater achieves a larger purpose, which is pushing Black drama toward its *collective* existential Black identity through celebrating aesthetically *black consciousness* and defying oppression through a new kind of revolutionary theater. This revolutionary theater is the dialogue between the black individual, his/her nation, and the world. The collective notion of identity of the oppressed is addressed by existential black dramatists. They tend to move from the specific to the universal. “In fact, such themes transcend the restrictions of the classical binaries of black vs. white to a more universal appeal. It enlarges the space of Black existence by moving from the domestic sphere to the public sphere” (Al-Jarrah, 2020, p. 6).

This new ideology is presented in Ed Bullins’s *In the Wine Time* (1968). He stages the black characters in their socio-existential realities through his realistic personification of the black existential dilemma. The play presents a picture of the human demography entangled in its *collective existence* in the face of racism and poverty. The purpose of which is to shake blacks out of their larval existence. Genva Smitherman (1974) points out that Bullins’s natural style enables the black community to “see all themselves in all their terrible ugliness—in hopes that from this profound glimpse, they will be cleansed” (Smitherman, 1974, pp. 5-6). This new kind of “naturalism” is collective in nature and addresses social, political, and economic issues in a self-reflective manner. Mike Sell (2006) explains: “Like the synonymous hairstyle, the natural play maneuvers soulfully and stylistically across the wilds of performativity and essentialism, appearing utterly natural in the midst of the most outrageous fictions and misperceptions” (Sell, 2006, p. 12).

2- Discussion

The plot of *In the Wine Time* portrays the miserable situation of a group of young black characters—both men and women—living in a black ghetto, Derby Street during the 1950s. In this ghetto, to pass the time and kill their boredom, the black characters spend their days drinking low-quality wine and gin, having conversations, and cursing one another. But this day is special. Ray, who

lives in his aunt's house, will be celebrating his sixteenth birthday and he longs for joining the navy like his aunt's husband, Cliff. While Ray's aunt, Lou, objects to sending Ray to the navy, Cliff encourages Ray to get out of the black ghetto. However, among the issues that emerge from the interactions among these black characters are the love affairs between Ray and Bunny and then between Bunny and Red. By the end of the play, Ray and Red fight over Bunny. Eventually, Ray kills Red with a knife, but it is Cliff who claims the responsibility of this crime in order to prevent his young step-nephew, Ray, from being imprisoned to enable him to pursue his future dreams.

The first manifestation of the idea of *collectivity* is introduced through the idea of drinking wine; it is an opportunity for socialization and it offers a time of building up *collective black consciousness*. As the first scene unfolds, the audience sees,

All the steps are occupied by members of the various Derby Street households . . . All lights are down but the corner streetlamp, though dim shadows of the people on the stoops can be seen carrying on their evening activities: talking, gossiping, playing checkers and cards, drinking sodas, wine, and beer. (Bullins, 2006, p. 66)

The above-quoted lines present the conviviality of life in the black ghetto. As a result of their sickening situation, they have developed shared habits and physiological defense mechanisms to face their reality and to adjust to their restrictive environment. They respond to their oppressive situation with multiple repulsive behaviors.

In his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre (1965) details the purpose of these rituals, arguing that the oppressed perform as the oppressed individual. He

shuns his deep desires by inflicting on himself odd rites that monopolize him at every moment. They dance: that keeps them occupied; it relaxes their painfully contracted muscles, and what's more, the dance secretly mimes, often unbeknownst to them, the No they dare not voice, the murders they dare not commit. (Sartre, 1965, p. Liii)

In addition, throughout the performance, Bullins implements music to build the collective black consciousness and to reflect on the characters' situation: "From within the DAWSONS' house black music of the period—called rhythm 'n' blues by disc jockeys at that time—is heard not too loudly and continues throughout the play" (Bullins, 2006, p. 66). George Bass (1983), in "Theatre and the Afro-American Rite of Being," argues that African American music is used to alleviate black suffering, to confirm their humanity, and to create connection and bridges among the past, the present, and the future toward connecting black people as a whole (Bass, 1983, p. 64). These collective habits and shared behaviors present a cultural homogeneity to dissolve differences among the characters. In a way, this collective consciousness is accompanied by the collective existential struggle toward existence. The Prologue of the play sheds light on the collective existential struggle of these black characters in their ghetto. In nothing-to-do situation, they search for freedom and for confirming their identity. Ray describes the situation clearly,

Summer and Cliff and Lou and me together—all proud from the same brew, all hating each other and loving and consuming and never forgiving—but not letting go of the circle until the earth swung again into winter, bringing me closer to manhood and the freedom to do all the things I had done for the past three summers. (Bullins, 2006, p. 64)

The sense of collectivity and togetherness is expressed by Ray. A young black orphan, he lives with his aunt and her husband. All of them are bound together in Derby Street and face the same oppressive reality. In *The Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South America*, Olga Barrios (2008) points out, “The idea of the circle comprises a double intention. On the one hand, the idea of oneness, of bringing people together; on the other hand, it suggests an enclosed space, that is to say, imprisonment and/or oppression” (Barrios, 2008, p. 92). Ray cannot leave his aunt’s house and Derby Street, nor can he enlist in the navy until he completes his sixteenth “cycle” of life and obtains his guardian’s signature.

Ray is bound to his aunt, Cliff, and with time. All of this appears to be his source of anxiety; he has to determine his trajectory in life as a free man, but he is faced with his miserable situation. Consequently, he lives a passive life as his life is determined by those relatives that he lives with and by his existence in the black ghetto. The existential notion of finding meaning in life and searching for freedom is highlighted at the outset of the play. Ray has to search for this meaning and to find freedom out of this collective black suffering and collective black fate. Bullins provides the spectators with a conversation between Ray and a fictional lady, who urges Ray to follow her. Ray asks where he can find her, and she replies,

Out in the world, little boy out in the world. Remember, when you’re ready, all you have to do is leave this place and come to me, I’ll be waiting. All you’ll need to do is search!’ . . . then I turned back to meet autumn and Cliff and Lou in our last wine time, meeting the years which had to hurry hurry so I could begin my search that I have not completed. (Bullins, 2006, p. 65)

The lady becomes a symbol of Ray’s search for new possibilities in life and a symbol of transcending his ghettoized situation. In his article, “The Inner and the Outer City,” Robert L. Tener (1975) argues, “That transcendence seems to be more than a dream; it is a possibility, one of those future directions or worlds open on the basis of choice and opportunity” (Tener, 1975, pp. 243-4). This choice and this opportunity are based on a shared decision to be taken by Ray, Cliff, and Lou.

That said, the play embodies a dialogue between two existential levels: the individual level and the collective level. The first level is represented by Ray as a black individual who seeks to achieve his freedom and who is anxious about his future and about the destiny awaiting him in the black ghetto. The second level is represented by Cliff as an existential black man who cares for other black people in the ghetto; especially he is highly concerned with the future of his nephew, Ray. The ghettoized environment in Derby Street becomes a place of a collective challenge. It brings all the blacks who live there together in their struggle against misery. Ray emphasizes,

We were the group, the gang. Cliff and Lou entangled within their union, soon to have Baby Man, and Henrietta, and Stinky, and Debra, and maybe who knows who by now. Summer and

me wrapped in our embrace like lovers, accepting each as an inferior, continually finding faults and my weaknesses, pretending to forgive though never forgetting, always at each other's vitals . . . My coterie and my friend . . . (Bullins, 2006, p. 64)

The black ghetto becomes a place for their collective suffering. Therefore, Cliff wants Ray to get out of this collective suffering into individual freedom. Cliff tells Lou, "In the navy, Ray can travel and see things and learn . . . How would you want him to be like. . . one of the Derby Street Donkeys? Or one of the ditty boppers or an avenue hype. . . or. . . a drug addict. . . or what?" (Bullins, 2006, p. 81). Aesthetically, the scene ends as Lou gets inside the house and the light turns into *blackness*, suggesting that this conversation is not about Ray's future alone, but also the future of Blackness as a *collective* notion of identity.

However, Ray's choice and his opportunity of transcending his miserable situation are to be achieved through the help of other black people. The individual suffering makes a shared suffering and the individual freedom leads to collective freedom. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1996) argues that it is man who "brings society into being" and any unilateral process of liberation might be described as incomplete and will be prone to failure (Fanon, 1996, p. 4). Therefore, liberating the black individual is liberating the black society as a whole and, in turn, liberating all oppressed people in the world. Ray summarizes this collective suffering that requires a collective will, "The nights found me awake with Cliff and Lou and our bottles of port, all waiting for the sun to rise again and then sleep in dozes during the miserable hours" (Bullins, 2006, p. 63-64). The "natural" style of Bullins's drama presents the concept of existence in the black ghetto as having a direct contact with life on a daily basis that brings those who live in Derby Street to go on despite their daily challenges against oppression, marking their *collective consciousness* toward existence and liberation. In "African and Afro-Caribbean Existential Philosophies," Paget Henry (1997) explains the collective black consciousness which is part of the Black existence. Paget reiterates that Black existentialism is

The systematic formulation by an individual or group of an ongoing consciousness of its existence that is first concretely realized in everyday interactions and practices. The consciousness of existence is determined in part by the long-term constraints and possibilities experienced in specific life situations. (Paget, 1997, p. 15)

After establishing the existential doctrine and in order to make a contrast and a link between the individual and the collective notions of the Black existence, Bullins shines light on his existential hero, Cliff.

Cliff is a young Black man, married to Ray's aunt, Lou. He served for a long time in the Navy before he came to live in Derby Street. He has seen and visited many places in the world. Now, he has no job; therefore, he goes to school to study business in order to improve the family's situation. Like other black characters who live in Derby Street, Cliff is bound by his relation to family and neighbors; in this case, to his wife, Lou, and his children. Cliff and Lou are expecting the birth of a child, which is revealed to be the family's source of anxiety, as Cliff cannot afford the family's basic needs. Cliff refuses to have a baby because he is jobless and he is just going to school to improve his chances in life.

He also refuses to have a dollar-an-hour job and refuses to work in a laundry like other blacks. He postulates, “Naw, I don’t want a baby I can’t take care of. . . do you? . . . I don’t want any kinds until I can afford them. That’s why I’m goin’ ta school” (Bullins, 2006, p. 80). He refuses to be submissive like other black people in the ghetto, “Well, you want me to get a job in the laundry? Like your all cousins? . . . I won’t work!” (Bullins, 2006, p. 80). In general, Bullins depicts Cliff as having a rebellious dominating personality throughout the performance.

Cliff steps out of this group of black characters to be a person of existential vision, will, and determination. He wants to save his people, especially his step-nephew, Ray, from being submerged by the miserable situation of the blacks in the Derby ghetto as a poverty-stricken place. Cliff expresses the Black existential notion of commitment; his commitment toward his oppressed people. Olga Barrios (2008) points out, “Commitment is indispensable when taking an action to stop the self-destruction within the community. In addition, commitment applies to the artist in the same manner” (Barrios, 2008, p. 92). On the one hand, this commitment reveals the blacks’ need to define themselves in the face of oppression and, on the other hand, to define themselves in the face of life itself more than in relation to racial issues.

In *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Nationalism*, Dexter B. Gordon (2003) argues, “The ideology of black nationalism emphasizes black self-definition and self-determination in contrast to the continuing efforts of white Anglo-America to define blacks and determine their role in the debate about race” (Gordon, 2003, p. 1). This sense of commitment that Bullins expresses concerns Derby Street people collectively. Importantly, the dynamic spirit of these young black people he depicts transcends the mere notion of survival (Grant, 1997). Therefore, we see Cliff urge his step-nephew to explore the world as what the mysterious lady advises at the beginning of the play. That is, Black drama and Black identity moves from the particular to the universal and tends to transcend its limitation.

The limitations of life make Cliff fed up with living on Derby Street. His depressing situation causes him to quarrel with his wife, Lou. They quarrel over several issues such as their coming baby, Cliff’s job, and most importantly, Ray’s future. As a Black existentialist, Cliff is always occupied with other black people who live in Derby Street and with their lives. Brenda Dianne Watson argues, “Cliff does not want Ray to become trapped like him. From his own experiences, Cliff knows that Ray has a good chance for a better life; a life that will not restrict him to the Derby Streets of the urban cities. Ray is young, and his life is just starting” (Bullins, 2006, p. 35). In fact, Ray and Cliff represent a collective new generation of black people who strive to tear off their people’s restrictive realities. Therefore, Cliff addresses Ray, “You youngbloods own the future. . .remember that. . . I had my chance. All can do now is sit back and raise fat babies. It’s your world now, boy” (Bullins, 2006, p. 88).

In fact, Cliff and Ray consider Lou and her pregnancy as a burden and restraint on achieving freedom. This notion embodies a criticism against their sexist notion of collectivity. This restriction is dramatized from the beginning of the play. In the Prologue, the image of the fictional woman with whom Ray falls in love is replaced by the image of Lou. Lou becomes the representation of the

restrictive reality for Ray as opposed to the fictional woman who represents Ray's hope. In a very suggestive moment in the Prologue, while Ray narrates his romantic experience with the fictional lady during one summer in the black ghetto, he shows how his dream is faced with his restrictive reality: "Then, afterwards, I would stand before the shop refusing to believe the slander from within. 'Ray . . . why do you act so stupid?' Lou asked each day I arose to await the rendezvous" (Bullins, 2006, p. 63). Ray emphasizes the idea that his life is caught between two women: the fictional woman that urges him to follow her and Lou who represents a constraint on his freedom as she objects the idea of sending him to the navy. Cliff emphasizes Lou's image as bondage: "No, not like me . . . not tied down to a half-grown, scared, childish bitch!" (Bullins, 2006, p. 79). In *A Voice from the South*, Cooper (1988) argues, "As far as my experience goes, the average man of our race is less frequently ready to admit the actual need among the sturdier forces of the world for women's help or influence" (Cooper, 1988, p. 135). This sexist notion is an issue in the play and for the Black Arts Movement, which is characterized, to an extent, by its sexism and misogyny (Smethurst, 2005).

Lou as an existential character has two missions: the first one is characterized by her search to find and confirm her identity in the society and the second one is her mission to get her people recognize their connectedness. Lou has a job and, to some extent, she is financially independent. She reminds her husband, Cliff, with this fact, which makes him confess: "And they made a hell of a noise about that, too. Always whisperin' how you work so hard all day in a laundry for no-count me who goes around carryin' books. And gets home in the middle of the afternoon and jest lays around like a playboy . . ." (Bullins, 2006, p. 71). The idea of reversing the traditional gender roles between Cliff and Lou has made the couple seem strangers among the other blacks on Derby Street. In fact, this represents a step forward toward the black female liberation and authentic existence against the black sexism to achieve a collective notion of freedom.

This inter-gender collective notion is based on reciprocity rather than on male supremacy. In "The Self-Other Relationship in Beauvoir's Ethics and Autobiography," Ursula Tidd (1999) explains de Beauvoir's reciprocal notion of woman's coexistence with men that de Beauvoir "advocates reciprocal recognition between men and women rooted in friendship, generosity, and love rather than tyranny and conflict. To achieve this, women must assert themselves as independent subjects through work and demand recognition in their own right" (Tidd, 1999, p. 168). On several occasions, Lou confronts Cliff with her independent subjectivity: "I'm the one who made a man out of you even though your mother and the whole United States Navy failed" (Bullins, 2006, p. 75). On several occasions, Lou is presented as Cliff's counterpart and she also presents counter-arguments. In Act I, for example, Lou and Cliff speak at the same time about the same issue. On the first occasion, Lou expresses her collective responsibility toward her family. She explains this responsibility to Ray, "And your mother is gonna call me to account for it when we meet up in heaven [The devil's in Cliff, I know that, to do what he's doin' to us . . . Listen to what I say, Ray]" (Bullins, 2006, p. 77). On the other occasion, Lou rebukes Cliff for not being a man and tries to make him recognize his collective responsibility represented by her and his children: "You ain't no man . . . YOU'RE NOTHING'!" (Bullins, 2006, p. 81). In fact, Lou tries to stir Cliff's enthusiasm toward his collective responsibilities rather than criticizing him.

Like Cliff, Lou tries to confirm her subjectivity by keeping order to create a sense of connectedness and expelling differences. Lou rebukes the others for their bad habits and obscene language. For example, at the beginning of Act III, Lou is presented as the controller of other black characters on Derby Street. She chastises Red for his offensive words: “If you must sit on my steps this late at night, Red, I wish you’d respect me and the other girls here by not bein’ so foul mouthed” (Bullins, 2006, p. 93). In addition, Lou tends to create solidarity among black characters, especial among female characters. In the same scene, she objects the treatment of black female characters as a sexual object. Therefore, she asks Red to watch his acts when he puts his hand on Bunny’s breasts: “And watch how you act . . . Yeah, you keep your hands to yourself. I saw that” (Bullins, 2006, pp. 96-7). In the same context, she sides with Tiny when Clark frightens her. She warns Tiny: “From the way you holler, sister, I know they’ll have to want you really bad to get you” (Bullins, 2006, p. 90). She also warns Ray against abusing Bunny, “I ain’t gonna let you start anything with little Bunny, you hear, Ray?” (Bullins, 2006, p. 91). Consequently, Lou refuses to objectify black women, emphasizing the existential black togetherness between black female and male characters.

As Lou is always inclined to keep the people of Derby Street disciplined and under control, Cliff considers this a restriction on his freedom. Cliff complains, “You always tellin’ me to be quiet . . . I don’t even make half the noise that some of our good neighbors do” (Bullins, 2006, p. 67). Throughout her collective mission, Lou is faced with physical oppression by Cliff although the doctor warned him against hitting her: “You beat on me and I’m supposed to forget it? In my condition . . . You know the doctor told you not to be hittin’ on me no mo’” (Bullins, 2006, p. 80). Lou strives against gendered oppression imposed on the black woman by her own people. We see that she tries to protect her pregnancy against Cliff’s attempts to make her miscarry by hitting her. The black woman represents the tie between people and their place and, at the same time, she is considered a restriction on male characters’ freedom. In addition, Ray’s loss of hope for a romantic relationship with a woman represents the lack of including the black woman in their collective freedom. Interestingly, by the end of the play when Cliff is taken by the police, Lou’s collective role toward her people is emphasized. Explicitly, Cliff asks Lou to take care of Ray and she responds, “He’s all I got left, Cliff . . . He’s all the family I got left” (Bullins, 2006, p. 100). That is, Cliff’s collective role is transferred to Lou as an existentialist character. The collective existential message that *In the Wine Time* highlights is “We are absolutely free today if we choose to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite” (de Beauvoir, 1948, p. 159).

In fact, Cliff wants to achieve his revolutionary ambitions through Ray. He wants Ray to rebel against the established order in Derby Street. In “A Black Sisyphus? Existentialism in Ed Bullins’ Play *In the Wine Time*,” Boris Vormann (2007) argues, “Using an absurd character in the play *In the Wine Time* can thus also be read as a critique not of life’s futility per se, but of life’s futility in the black ghetto, that coerces its inhabitants to adapt to its rules” (Vormann, 2007, p. 9). As Cliff questions the meaning of life in the black ghetto, he tries to create a meaning for his life and other people’s life. While he recognizes the futility of life in Derby Street, he wants other people to achieve what he could not achieve due to his suppressive reality. Cliff tells Ray to “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 you mind. . . Just do what you have to do as a man" (Bullins, 2006, p. 95).

The play builds up two opposite groups of blacks: those who want to rebel against their miserable situation and those who accept reality as it is. The first group is represented by Ray and Cliff, people of action and existential visions. The other group is represented by the rest of the characters such as Red, Bunny, and, sadly, Lou. The first group follow their will and searches for freedom and rebel against oppression and the limited opportunities in life, whereas the other group have accepted their life. They just sit, talk, stroll, and drink wine. For example, Lou mocks Ray for going out every day to meet his fictional lady, "Ray... why do you act so stupid . . . Well, if you know you're bein' a fool, why do you go on moonin' out there in the streets for that?" (Bullins, 2006, p. 63). Moreover, she does not want her nephew to leave Derby Street. The clash between the two ideologies of these two black groups constitutes a transformation of the collective blackness from the state of collective servile objectivity to rebellious collective subjectivity. Cliff's ideas defy the proslavery idea that the ghetto is the right and natural place for blacks.

In addition, the existence of the white family, the Krump's, in this black environment is very significant. At some point in the performance, we see that Mr. Krump is drunk and he cannot hold himself straight enough to go up to his flat. Spectators observe that his son, Edward, refuses to help him and it is Ray who helps him to his flat in spite of being ridiculed by the others. In this scene, we see Bullins contrasting white individualism with black collectivity. Ray presents the new version of black collectivity which is not restricted to blacks who live in the black ghetto, but also to the whites who live there. At the beginning of the scene, Cliff objects the idea of Ray helping Mr. Krump to his house and tries to dissuade him from doing so, "You stay yo' ass where ya belong, Ray" (Bullins, 2006, p. 68). Cliff seems to associate the idea of belonging with one's actions. He considers Ray to belong to the blacks, whereas Ray considers himself to belong to anyone—black and white—who needs help. That is, in the wine time, black and white are the same in the eyes of Ray. The collective nature of black identity responds to other people's miseries irrespective of their color. This collective identity presents a new version of identity. In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1996) argues,

Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, even an ideal reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened. For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (Fanon, 1963, p. 316)

In fact, Cliff as a black individual with existential vision, considers Ray's choices and future to be a continuation for his and for black subjectivity generally, as Ray represents the next black generation: "There's a world out there, woman. Just beyond that lamppost. . . just across 'The Avenue,' and it'll be mine and Ray's" (Bullins, 2006, p. 81). The success of the black individual is a success for all the black community. This success could bring change into the life of millions of blacks.

Lou tells Cliff, “You the one that’s always sayin’ everybody here on Derby Street only does what they want to do most of the time, anyway” (Bullins, 2006, p. 67). That is, as Magnus Bassey (2007) argues, “Black existential thinkers protest on behalf of their race as a whole rather than on behalf of the individual” (Bassey, 2007, p. 919). Cliff wants to rebel against the Derby Street principles. It starts from the first day he and Lou moved in. At first, they seemed strangers to Derby Street people. Being black-skinned, he believed that he would have belonged to Derby Street and its people as soon as he and his family moved in, but they were faced by rejection by some of the black people there like Miss Minny, who passed a petition to have them removed from Derby Street. The couple seems strangers to the rest of blacks in Derby Street because they have disturbed the tranquility of life in the ghetto. As a leading character, Cliff maintains control over other Derby Street characters. Cliff applies his own rules and principles on his life and in dealing with other Derby Street people, which make other people adopt his own way of life. Red, for example, explains, “I’m usin’ Mr. Dawson’s rule book” (Bullins, 2006, p. 93). Cliff’s lifestyle disturbs some of their neighbors who try to acquire a middle-class lifestyle as represented by Miss Minny who always criticizes Cliff and his friends and always tends to be in conformity with white people.

It is noteworthy that the collectivity of the black identity does mean to mutilate the black person’s individuality. The existential socio-racial situation that Bullins demonstrates in the play brings to light the rebellious personality of Cliff as an individual who never loses his distinctive identity. For example, he gets angry when the policeman calls Cliff with his first name. Cliff considers it as an insult. Consequently, he calls the policeman with “Officer Murphy.” Ray notices this situation and asks Cliff about the reason for calling the white officer with “Murphy” while it is not the officer’s actual name. Cliff replies, “To me it is. . . If he doesn’t know to call my right name, I don’t know his . . . he said “Cliff” like he was sayin’ ‘boy.’ He didn’t say ‘Mr. Dawson’ (Bullins, 2006, pp. 89-90). As an existential rebellious character, Cliff wants Ray to get rid of the inferior consciousness of his people and to grow up to his individuality. He wants him to be free and to follow his own will and desire. Cliff tells Ray, “It’s your world, son. It’s really your world” (Bullins, 2006, p. 76). Cliff wants Ray to achieve what he wills not what his aunt nor what his dead mother wanted him to be. Cliff argues with Lou over Ray’s desire to go to the navy, emphasizing, “I don’t care what his dead mother wants. Who the hell cares what the dead want? It’s what Ray wants that counts. He’s got to get out of here. . . don’t you, Ray? . . . Off’a Derby Street and away from here so he can grow up to his own man” (Bullins, 2006, p. 79).

However, Cliff’s existential vision culminates when Ray fights with Red after Red urinates in the wine bottle and hands it to Ray to drink. Cliff and the other characters rush into the alley to see what is going on between Ray and Red. Ray and Cliff get out of the alley with their shirts full of blood and Cliff is holding Red’s knife. When the police come, Cliff claims the responsibility of killing Red. Lou begs Cliff to tell the truth and not to leave her, but he refuses saying, “I was protectin’ my family. . . our family” (Bullins, 2006, p. 100). Cliff wants to protect the hope of the new black generation for a better life. He urges Ray to follow his dreams and his will. The play ends as the light “turns to *blackness* and a commercial begins on the radio” (Bullins, 2006, p. 100).

As soon as the policeman comes and handcuffs Cliff, Ray bemoans his luck and says that his lady of Derby Street has gone and she will never be back again. In fact, Ray expresses his loss of hope in improving his life as he is now the only person to look after his aunt. The awakening moment that Ray experiences moves Cliff's existential vision from the theoretical level to the level of actualization. Ray realizes his sordid situation and kills Red and, at this point, Bullins's existential characters complete their cycle. That is, Ray's experience is threefold: dreaming, realizing, and acting. That is, he starts as a dreamer of a better future, he then realizes his repressive reality, and finally, he rebels against his dehumanizing situation. Ray meets the mysterious fictional lady at the beginning of the play and dreams of a better future. Then he realizes that he is trapped in Derby Street's life. Finally, he breaks his bondage by killing Red in a moment of awakening. Mance Williams (1985) explains,

To be seen hanging on the corner means that one has transgressed and is psychologically and spiritually lost. But by turning his or her back on the corner and breaking the weak bonds of friendship that exist there, the individual has, at least symbolically, taken the first step toward 'salvation.' Giving up the corner is tantamount to beginning a new life. (Williams, 1985, p. 128)

Unfortunately, no sooner is the bondage broken than Ray is entrapped in new bondage. Bullins employs scathing criticism against the individualistic type of life other black people live in the ghetto which hinders the advancement of the collective black prosperity. As a result, they need to work together to achieve their collective freedom and transcend their problems. Olga Barrios (2008) points out,

While Bullins celebrates a street and/or a ghetto life and culture — its values of togetherness and senses of community—he, simultaneously, warns of the danger of repeating the same mistakes. Therefore, the African American needs, on the other hand, to keep and nourish the values they own, and, on the other hand, changes what causes their enslavement and keeps them away from reaching their freedom. (Barrios, 2008, p. 92)

That said, the last scene of the play brings the two existential levels together: the individual and the collective. Cliff, as an existential hero, cares for his people and wants the black individual to rise above the collective suffering towards collective freedom. Ironically, by the end of the play, when Ray kills Red, Beatrice inquires about the problem, but Miss Minny tells her that she may come for tea tomorrow and she will inform her. Miss Minny is happy to get rid of Cliff and seems indifferent to those poor people's problems, the very idea that Bullins implement to criticize the individualistic lifestyle such people have toward life and *Blackness*. To this end, Bullins builds the existential character of Cliff to bridge the relationships among the underprivileged black people and their collective cause so that they work collectively to acquire their place in the world. In *Ed Bullins: A Literary Biography*, Samuel Hay (1997) explains, "This Binding Relationship play got one person to call up the experiences necessary to take complete control over his life. This better empowered him to teach others in ways that were heretofore impossible . . . to win their place and their peace" (Hay, 1997, p. 144).

3- Conclusion

To conclude, existential Black philosophy and existential Black drama present a collective notion of identity and struggle toward freedom. Bullins in *In the Wine Time* showcases a collective struggle against the oppressive reality through depicting a realistic image of the depressing life of the blacks in the black ghetto. Bullins builds collective existential *black consciousness* among his characters through the wine time. To this end, the play presents a dialogue between the individualistic level of existence and the collective one. The individual level is represented by those who do not care about their people's issues. On the other hand, the collective level of existence is represented by Cliff who is always interested in his people's life in the ghetto and calls on for improving the oppressive reality through choice and opportunity. Therefore, he urges his nephew, Ray, to leave Derby Street and follow his own will to free himself and explore the world. The collective struggle the play shows throughout the performance intends to free the black individual as freeing the black individual is the first step toward achieving the collective freedom.

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