# PAUL GREEN'S SOUTH: A LAND OF CONTRASTS

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# PREFACE

In the prefatory remarks to his collected plays, Paul Green calls the South "a land of contrasts." He states further that in several of his plays he has attempted to disclose representative contrasts in Southern life.[1] In order to identify and analyze these contrasts, Green's plays are here examined in detail. Although his historical plays have been considered, no use of them is made in this study. They are alluded to briefly in a sketch of Green's literary career in Chapter I. This study deals almost exclusively with Green's folk plays, and identifies three major contrasts in his portrayal of the South: (1) wealth versus poverty, (2) culture versus barbarism, and (3) white versus black. Naturally, most of the plays contain more than one contrast, and each contrast is classified and analyzed.

The conclusion is treated differently from most conclusions. It is felt that one of Paul Green's plays, In Abraham's Bosom, is an epitome of his work, and this play is used to illustrate further the contrasts already disclosed and discussed in Chapters II, III, and IV.

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[1] Paul Green, "Introduction," Out of the South, p. xii.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Though the literary exploration of American regional and folk life started in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it did not take the form of drama until after the first World War when the "little theater" movement began to supply local centers for production. As a result of the establishment of these provincial art theaters, the folk drama has grown into one of the most promising and significant phases of the American stage. The founder of the folk theater in the United States was the late Frederick H. Koch, who came to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1918, organized the Carolina Playmakers, and opened the Playmakers Theater as the first playhouse in America to be dedicated to the creation of a native drama. It has inspired many plays concerning the Southern Negroes and rural whites.[1]

## Life and Works

The most distinguished product of Koch's enterprise and of the American folk theater is Paul Green, a son of the Carolina soil. He was born March 17, 1894, on a farm near

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[1] W. S. Clark II, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," Chief Patterns of World Drama, edited by W. S. Clark II, p. 1039.

Lillington, North Carolina, where he continued to live until the twenties. As a boy he worked in the fields spring, summer, and fall, and went to school a few months each winter. He became champion cotton picker of his county and an expert harvester.[2]

After graduating from Buie's Creek Academy in 1914 and teaching country school for two years, Green entered the University of North Carolina in 1916. The year after he came to Chapel Hill he published his first book, a collection of verse entitled _Trifles of Thought_. Before completing his freshman year, he joined the Army Engineer Corps and served with the A. E. F. in France during 1918. When he resumed his university course in 1919, he came under the influence of Koch and joined the Carolina Playmakers. He wrote two plays that year, "Souvenir," a war tragedy, and "The God on the Hill," a poetic drama, both of which he lost or destroyed. He wrote several other plays of no particular merit, but this experience aroused his enthusiasm for writing.[3]

In 1920 Green wrote "The Last of the Lowries," one of the most popular in a collection by the Playmakers entitled _Carolina Folk-Plays_. The plot resembles that of "Riders to the Sea." The play is based upon local history and the theme is more humanly dramatic than Synge's, since the tragic climax is brought about through the agency of man, whereas in Synge's the theme is only the statement of man's helplessness in the face of the forces of nature.[4]

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[2] _Ibid_.

[3] _Ibid_.

Two other plays followed in the same year, "Old Wash Lucas" and "The Old Man of Edenton," the one a character sketch and the other a melodrama.

"White Dresses," a prologue to Green's later plays and stories, was written in 1920 and deals with conflicts existing between two races of people, the white and black. The source of antagonism is a Negro girl's love for a white man.[5]

After graduation from Chapel Hill in 1921 he studied philosophy, first at his alma mater and then at Cornell University. In 1923 Chapel Hill appointed him to a post on the philosophy faculty. Some years later he shifted his academic duties from philosophy to dramatic art.[6]

The next Negro play to follow "White Dresses" was not written until after several "white" dramas, one-act plays of varying merit, some of them, like "The Lord's Will," rather interesting, and others, like "Round and Round," simply experimental exercises.

The second of his characteristic Negro plays is "The Prayer Meeting," a revelation of hidden corners in the soul and mind of the black man. It is a study of Negro psychology, with none of the disturbing elements introduced by white civilization. The same theme is more poignantly developed in the one-act version of "In Abraham's Bosom." The Negro's effort to better himself through education is the basis of this tragic episode.

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[4] B. H. Clark, Paul Green, p. 11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Clark, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," p. 1039.

Green attracted national attention for the first time in 1925 when his one-act play "The No 'Count Boy," produced by the Little Theater of Dallas, Texas, won the Belasco Cup at the national little theater tournament in New York. As a result, the Provincetown Players took Green's first full-length play, In Abraham's Bosom, for production at the end of 1926. Abraham is carried through seven scenes, each one showing a crisis in the hero's heartbreaking struggle to broaden his limited mental horizon. Though the play's run was short, it gained the Pulitzer Prize a few months after it closed. Then it was revived by the Provincetown Players and became popular.[7]

Another full-length play, The Field God, written in 1925, deals with religious rather than racial conflict. Hardy Gilchrist, a white farmer, suffers the hostility of both wife and community because he does not hold to the narrow, repressive tenets of the traditional fire-and-brimstone faith.[8]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 1041.

Also in 1925 six of Green's one-act plays were collected in a volume entitled The Lord's Will and Other Carolina Plays. "The Lord's Will," a tragedy of a country preacher, is one of the early expressions of the author's interest in the religious conflicts of ingrown communities. In 1926 six more one-act plays of Negro life were collected in the volume Lonesome Road. One of the plays, "Your Fiery Furnace," written in 1923, became the third act of In Abraham's Bosom. In "The Hot Iron" and "The End of the Row" the problem is that of the Negro who strives to better his condition, but in this case further complicated by sex. "The Hot Iron" is a tragedy of Negro degradation. In another play, "Tread the Green Grass," Green sought to shadow forth a somewhat fantastic interpretation of a young country girl as she goes mad through dreams and fears. Her excitable imagination has fed on folk legends and religion, and these, strangely intermingled in her mind, form the play. In these first plays are to be found in germ most of the themes developed more roundly in later works: the white man's injustice and blind cruelty toward the black man, love between Negro and white, the angry resentments bred by the pressures of small neighborhoods, the defeated aspirations of the tenant farmer, the tragedies caused by intense yet ignorant religious feeling, the decay of the old families in the Old South. In these first plays Green forged the language which is especially his: use of the local, specific word, speech cadences of Negroes and unlettered whites, moving rhythms, sudden poetry.[9]

In 1928 eleven one-acters were gathered together into a volume entitled In the Valley and Other Carolina Plays. "Quare Medicine" and "Unto Such Glory" are folk comedies full of good-natured fun. "The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock" is a bit of grotesque horseplay, genuine, imaginative, and poetic. "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin" is a Negro melodrama. It is not so much a study of panic fear as a grotesque fantasy on a variety of Negro themes. "Supper for the Dead" and "The Man on the House" are highly imaginative pieces, somber and tragic, haunting and fantastic. "The Goodbye," a brief scene, and "The Picnic," like "Saturday Night," are vignettes etched with extraordinary skill. "In the Valley," a long one-act tragedy, is one of his most beautiful studies of Negro life.[10]

In 1928 Robert M. McBride published a collection of Green's short stories under the title Wide Fields. In these stories Green began to shape the "Little Bethel" neighborhood, which has become more specific in his imagination and which follows somewhat clearly the Cape Fear Valley. He pictures the living and social conditions of the sharecropper and the Negro. There are several hundred characters whose lives center around the little community church, those in the graveyard and those who live in the neighborhood.[11]

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[9] Clark, Paul Green, pp. 16-31.

[10] Ibid., p. 20.

The background of Paul Green's drama is what he knows and loves best--the South. As he sees it, the South is "mainly a rural region whose ideologies and ethics are derived from the fields, the sky, the trees, and the hills--a region of violent contradictions like nature itself, . . . of hate and love, of wealth and degraded poverty, of passion and sloth, of soaring ambition and empty death."[12] Green chooses as his particular setting the eastern coastal plains of North Carolina, where his ancestral farm lies. Life in the fields there nurtured in him a profound awareness of the earth and of fellowship with man regardless of race. Of his early experience he writes: "My first memories are of Negro ballads ringing out by moonlight, and the rich laughter of the resting blacks, down by the river bottom. I started out very close to life--in the elemental. . . ."[13] He has never lost communion with the simple people of the soil who formed his first world:

> Back with my own folks, and I mean black and white, I can't help feeling. . . at home as I'll never feel at home elsewhere. The smell of their sweaty bodies, the gusto of their indecent jokes, the knowledge of their twisted philosophies, the

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[11] Ibid., p. 23.

[12] Clark, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," p. 1040.

[13] Ibid.

> sight of their feet entangled among the pea vines and grass, their shouts, grunts, and belly-achings, the sun blistering down upon them and the rim of the sky enclosing them forever, all took me wholly, and I was one of them--neither black nor white, but one of them, children of the moist earth underfoot.[14]

This impassioned expression of unity with all the common humanity in the South points to the secret of Green's power as a dramatist.[15]

Green designates his plays as "folk plays," a term first officially used in the American theater on the 1919 bills of the Carolina Playmakers. The "folk" are to Green "the people whose manners, ethics, religious and philosophical ideals are more nearly derived from and controlled by the ways of the outside physical world than by the ways and institutions of men in a specialized society." They stir his imagination to an exalted vision of their character. He sees them "as it were with their feet in the earth and their heads bare to the storms of living . . . more real and beautiful than those who develop their values and ambitions from rubbing shoulders in a crowded city." This folk wisdom he defines as a "consciousness of the great eternal Presence (good, bad, or impersonal) by which men live and move and are allowed their existence." It emerges as a motif in almost all his works.[16]

In 1928 Paul Green was honored with a Guggenheim Fellowship to study and write in Europe for two years. There he discovered the Moscow Jewish Theatre, directed by Alexis Granowsky, who gave him the idea of using marionettes and showed him how to combine music and drama to obtain the effect of moving an audience emotionally above the feelings produced alone by the spoken word; hence, his title for a new form of play soon to come from his pen, the "symphonic drama." In this form all the elements of the theater work together--words, music, song, dance, pantomine, and masks. The Lost Colony, an historical play, is an example of this symphonic drama. He prefers calling them plays rather than pageants because "a play tells a story, and the characters are individuals, not types, as is usually the case in masques and pageants. There is a conflict of wills, a goal--a story-line continuity."[17]

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[14] *Ibid.*     [15] *Ibid.*     [16] *Ibid.*

The best known of Green's long folk plays, beginning with the publication of The House of Connelly in the autumn of 1931, treat of basic conflicts in the contemporary South. As the maiden production of the Group Theatre, an offshoot of the Theatre Guild, The House of Connelly turned into a Broadway box-office attraction. The play exhibits social conflict, a decadently genteel Old South versus a democratic, hard-working New South.[18]

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[17] Paul Green, Dramatic Heritage, p. 46.

[18] Clark, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," p. 1041.

Paul Green has written two novels, The Laughing Pioneer, which appeared in 1932, and This Body of Earth, which followed in 1935. The first novel continues the story of the Little Bethel community. As in the short stories and plays, the setting is based on accurate knowledge of the soil and farming conditions of the coastal plain of eastern North Carolina. This story of the attempt at rehabilitation of an ancient and decaying estate reminds the reader of The House of Connelly. The second novel, however, is far richer in substance and more successfully worked out. It is one of the most moving and genuine portrayals in American fiction of the life of a Southern sharecropper. The novel recounts the life history of the tenant farmer.[19]

Both Shroud My Body Down and The Enchanted Maze had a première in Chapel Hill, one in 1934 and the other in 1935. Both of them aroused long and at times heated discussion in the university community. The plays were interwoven with music, underlining and expanding the meaning of the lines. Shroud My Body Down is a step away from reality since it had to be acted on the plane of the marionettes, like a scene reflected in a mirror. This slight but perceptible distance from reality is part of the perennial charm of the marionettes. All these things are a result of the influence of the Moscow Jewish Theatre. The Enchanted Maze was called "a satire on the American educational system." In short, Shroud My Body Down mystified Chapel Hill; The Enchanted Maze irritated the community.[20]

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[19] A. B. Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, p. 66.

In Johnny Johnson, another play with music, Green wrote a commentary on the tragic folly of war. Not so mystifying as Shroud My Body Down, nor so controversial as The Enchanted Maze, it lacks the haunting poetry of the first and the pungency of the second. The sound and basic concept of the natural, good man lost and driven in the herd-insanity of war is told in three acts and thirteen scenes. Concerning the play Green says:

> The story of the legend--that is what I like to call the play--is the musical autobiography of a common soldier whose natural common sense runs counter to a sophisticated civilization. The first act is a comedy, the second a tragedy and the third a satire. That sounds crazy and maybe I can't get away with it but that is what I have tried to write.[21]

In 1936 the Group Theatre performed the play in New York.

Green's genius for characterization and atmosphere more than offsets his weaknesses as a writer. He can illuminate the significant humanity in the Carolina farmers and Negro poor. His drama pictures with a rare sensitivity their simple, emotional natures; like them, it moves easily from humor to pathos, from comedy to tragedy. Tragedy tends to predominate because Green does not long forget that man is

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[20] Ibid., p. 68.

[21] Ibid., p. 71.

"a part of an all-powerful and demanding universe . . . never funny nor playful."[22] His dialogue catches to perfection the coarse and racy speech of the strongly earthbound natives. W. S. Clark compares Green's writing with that of Synge:

> Following the Synge tradition, . . . Green seeks to record the poetry and music of . . . the earthbound natives. He would restore to the theater its ancient lyric heritage, the union of drama and song found in the stage representations of the Greeks. By the profuse insertion of singing and chant and the weaving of these musical elements into the dramatic movement, he has striven to create a richer form of art which he calls the symphonic play. This symphonic pattern represents a notably fresh amalgam of materials from native folk-life.[23]

He has thereby suggested an important new horizon for the American drama of tomorrow.

*Roll, Sweet Chariot* (a revision of the play published first in 1931 as *Potter's Field*), a symphonic play of the Negro people, discloses Green at his peak as folk poet and musician in the theater. It is a development of sketches and plays previously written; the idea for it had been held and shaped in the author's mind for a long time before it reached the three-act version, probably ever since his college days. It is a panoramic drama of a Negro community, with a great many characters who contribute to build up the total picture of a Southern slum closely resembling that on the western outskirts of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The approach of a new concrete highway threatens the teeming community with destruction, as the white man's civilization blindly obliterates the rich values of humor, song, and relaxed living, which are inherent in Negro life. The play was produced in New York in 1934, with music by Dolphe Martin.[24]

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[22] Clark, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," p. 1041.

[23] *Ibid*.

As early as 1928, while in Germany, Green was pondering the idea of a Virginia Dare "sort of lyrical song-drama," the germ of The Lost Colony. The story of Sir Walter Raleigh's colonists, vanished forever from the outer fringe of the American wilderness, had fascinated him from childhood. For years the dream of a play which would tell fittingly the romantic Roanoke Island story had been carried around in his mind. Yet when he was first asked by the Roanoke Island Historical Association to write a pageant to celebrate the three hundred fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Virginia Dare, he refused. After a time he promised to have the play for production by the summer of 1937. The play was to be given in a large ampitheater. In the creation of The Lost Colony Paul Green succeeded in that harmonious integration of music and drama, that enlargement of the realm of drama, toward which he had been working. The setting favored him--the whole Atlantic for a backdrop, the sky full of summer stars for a ceiling. Here he had escaped from the "picture-frame stage" convention; the outdoors gave him a freedom and a range impossible in any theater, and he made the most of it by employing three stages in a long panorama, by shifting lights from side to side, thus creating continuous movement instead of the staccato interruption of scenes, and by unifying the whole with music. Large audiences saw it each summer from 1937 through 1941; after that it had to be closed for four years during World War II. The play reopened in the summer of 1946. In 1941 the state had taken formal recognition of The Lost Colony as an institution of importance to North Carolina by underwriting it to the extent of $10,000 a year if necessary, "to serve as a year-to-year guarantee of the continued presentation of this historical and patriotic drama." By the end of the 1950 season, more than 450,000 people had seen The Lost Colony. From the point of view of development as an artist, Green's decision to write The Lost Colony was a major turning point. It led to the creation of symphonic historical dramas and to the writing of similar plays for Manteo and Fayetteville, North Carolina; Williamsburg, Virginia; and Washington, D. C.; Columbus, Ohio; Santa Barbara, California, and possibly one for the state of Georgia.[25] In addition to North Carolina's formal adoption of The Lost Colony, the year 1941 held additional recognition for Paul Green. In January the National Institute of Arts and Letters elected him a member. In June Western Reserve University conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. In his citation, President W. G. Leuthner spoke of Green as a "creative genius whose artistic expression in novel, poetry, and drama has made the common life, the warm passion, and the spiritual striving of the people of . . . his native state a precious heritage of the nation and the English-speaking world."[26]

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[24] Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, p. 56.

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[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 75-83.

The success of The Lost Colony made Green the obvious choice of an author when the Cape Fear Valley Historical Association decided that it would like to celebrate the region's history in drama. The celebration took place at Fayetteville in November, 1939.[27]

For this celebration Paul Green wrote The Highland Call. The subtitle describes it as a "symphonic play of American history in two acts with hymn tunes, folk songs, ballads and dance."[28] The pageant takes up the story of Flora MacDonald and her family in defeat and exile as they leave Scotland for the new world and follows them through the confused and dubious days of the American Revolution. In a sense this play is a continuation of the story of The Lost Colony, adding another act to the dramatization of the establishment of the country and "reaffirming America's destiny as the refuge and hope of oppressed people."[29] The music for The Highland Call is made up of traditional Scotch ballads, dances, hymns, and carols.[30]

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[26] Ibid., p. 83. [27] Ibid., p. 84. [28] Ibid., p. 85.

The Common Glory, presented at Williamsburg, Virginia, is another example of the symphonic historical drama. The play covers six years in the life of Thomas Jefferson and is concerned mainly with his efforts to further the creation of democratic government in the United States.[31]

The fourth of Green's symphonic dramas to express a step in evolution of the American dream was entitled Faith of Our Fathers. The play was written for the one hundred fiftieth anniversary celebration of the establishment of Washington, D. C. For the production an outdoor theater was erected in Rock Creek Park near the heart of the city. In writing the script Green's very first thought was to portray George Washington "as a warm-blooded human being, as he must have been before the biographers and historians got hold of him."[32] He placed Washington against a background of the difficult years from 1783-1799. But he was determined that the human figure should stand out from the confusion of a transitional period. He wrote:

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Green, Dramatic Heritage, p. 24.

[32] Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, p. 107.

> It is the author's hope that when the play is over, the public will have got pretty much the full impact of the lusty compile man, from youth to age, with, as I said, emphasis being on the later years of Washington's life. For these years summed up in themselves his experience as a man, a fighter, a devoted husband, a citizen, a farmer, a noble and practical pioneer, a figure of inspiration to all those who have come after him.[33]

The playwright made it clear that only with a leader like Washington could the young nation have survived in a hostile world. The play opened August 4, 1950, in an open-air theater which is undoubtedly the finest in the country. Built at a cost of over a half million dollars, with 4,059 seats and a triple stage 158 feet wide, an orchestra pit for 60 musicians and a stage-area to accommodate 250 actors, it is indeed a tremendous contribution to the cultural life of the national capital.[34]

There have been other symphonic dramas--The 17th Star, produced at Columbus, Ohio, in the summer of 1953, in celebration of the state's sesquicentennial celebration; Serenata, a fiesta drama of old Spanish days in Santa Barbara, in the summer of 1953; and The Shepherd of the Isles, a drama of the humanitarian James Oglethorpe and his settlements of Georgia on Saint Simon's Island, scheduled in 1954.[35]

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[33] Ibid., pp. 107-108.

[34] Ibid., p. 110.

The development of the historical play gives Green satisfaction, since he feels it approaches that people's theater which he has desired to establish in this country.

> This type of drama which I have elected to call symphonic seems to be fitted to the needs and dramatic genius of the American people. Our rightness of tradition, our imaginative folk life, our boundless enthusiasm and health, our singing and dancing and poetry, our lifted hearts and active feet and hands, even our multitudinous mechanical and machine means for self-expression--all are too outpouring for the narrow confines of the usual professional and kindly expensive Broadway play and stage. But they can be put to use in the symphonic drama and its theatre. It is wide enough, free enough, and among the people cheap enough for their joy and use.[36]

During the summer of 1940, Green collaborated with Richard Wright in converting the latter's novel Native Son into a play for Broadway. This is the story of a Negro whose crime results from society's denial of his basic rights.[37]

During the early 1940's, Paul Green spent much of his time in Hollywood writing scripts for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but he soon gave it up in disgust and returned to Chapel Hill.[38]

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[35] Green, Dramatic Heritage, p. 25.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[37] Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, p. 88.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

He has also experimented with plays for radio. One of the first of these, The Southern Cross, published in 1938, deals with the power of the dead past and touches also upon the Confederate migration to Texas. Especially interesting because of its relation to The Common Glory, a later play, is the radio play "The Critical Year: A One-Act Sketch of American History and the Beginning of the Constitution." The action takes place in Boston ten years after the American Revolution, when Paul Revere and Daniel Shay decided to petition George Washington to take the lead in forming a strong central government. The author's concept here of the difficulties and agonies of the American Revolution is identical with that which he has developed more fully in The Common Glory.[39]

Green's honest idealism found expression in two volumes of essays published during the 1940's: The Hawthorn Tree and Forever Growing. The first essay, "Preface to Professors," emphasizes the fact that Green the dramatist and poet has remained also at heart the teacher. The idea in "Preface to Professors" is dramatized in The Enchanted Maze and expanded further in Forever Growing: his conviction that college teaching often blunts and cheats the aspirations of the young student.[40]

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[39] Ibid., p. 93.

[40] Ibid., p. 94.

In Salvation on a String and Other Tales of the South, a further collection of stories published in 1946, Green continued the account of the Little Bethel community. Their range is from the pathetic and at times the sentimental to the salty and humorous. Many of these stories in their dramatic quality and the natural rhythms of the dialogue show the playwright's deftness. "Fine Wagon," the story with which the book closes, stands out as one of the most moving things that Green has written. He brings to life a little Negro boy and indicates his inescapable future. As in the first act of In Abraham's Bosom, in this tender and flawless episode, the seeds of tragedy are seen to stir and sprout.[41]

In Paul Green's most recent collection of short stories, Dog on the Sun, published in 1949, the story of the Negro boy in "Fine Wagon" is continued in "Sun Go Down." Here the reader experiences the humiliation of the little boy, his realization of his parent's plight, and the foreshadowing of his father's death. Several of the stories are centered around a Southern university town.[42]

Green's purpose of writing folk plays is one to which he has adhered, unless the Hollywood years and the historical dramas are to be considered deviations. He once wrote: "From its beginning three hundred years ago, until the present, North Carolina has made no lasting contribution to the art of the world. Several million people have lived and died here, and no one has set himself aside in high-minded and intelligent devotion to record a single one of these lives. . . ."[43] The phrase "intelligent devotion" describes the manner in which he approached his task of interpreting the lives of people with whom he had grown up.[44]

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[41] Ibid., p. 95.

[42] Ibid., p. 96.

Paul Green has been one of the most faithful and the most illuminating interpreters of the rural life of North Carolina, and through his intimate knowledge and understanding of one locality has been able also to interpret the South. Good sense and good judgment have made him willing to confine his writing to the area of his own observation and knowledge; imagination has enabled him to progress from that simple area to larger concern with the fundamental problems of mankind. Passion for justice for the Negro and the sharecropper led in his thinking to a passion for justice for all humanity, a belief in a democracy as a way of human righteousness, the social and economic problems of the young United States, and by implication, of all human kind.[45]

### Purpose of the Paper

Although recognition has been given Paul Green's historical plays, it is with his folk plays that this paper will be concerned. These folk plays treat of basic conflicts in the contemporary South: social conflicts, economic, religious, cultural, and racial conflicts. These plays present the South as a land of extensive contrasts: wealth and poverty, culture and barbarism, white man and black man.

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[43] _Ibid_., p. 29. [44] _Ibid_. [45] _Ibid_., p. 113.

In his folk plays Green sees men of wealth strive to increase their riches by exploiting the poor. Large plantation owners hire tenants to do manual labor for only the barest subsistence. Inadequate housing facilities are provided the sharecropper. The working man's food consists of fat side meat, beans, molasses, coffee, collards, and corn bread. As long as a tenant's health is good and he obeys his landowner, he can look forward to exhausting work, not enough food, inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, and illiteracy. In old age, he is likely to be dispensed with. The Southern aristocratic landowner with his fertile land and easy living is contrasted in Green's plays with the sharecropper and his eroded land, killing work, his frustrated ambition, and ignorance. These contrasts may be found in almost all of Green's folk plays, especially in "Fixin's," "The Humble Ones," "In the Valley," "Hymn to the Rising Sun," "Old Wash Lucas," "Fine Wagon," "Your Fiery Furnace," "Saturday Night," _The Field God_, _The House of Connelly_, _Roll, Sweet Chariot_, _In Abraham's Bosom_, _Native Son_, and _The Enchanted Maze_.

As men of wealth endeavor to increase their riches at the expense of the sharecropper, so the highest social group in the South has risen to so-called "cultural" heights through the medium of barbarism. These elite with selfish hearts and narrow minds are accepted and followed, whereas the man of common sense is pronounced crazy and sent to an insane asylum. With an air of superiority these "learned" men refuse education to less fortunate people. The Southern "philosopher" with his perverted reason and distorted ideas of Christianity confuses superstitious Southern country folk. Limited knowledge and biased religious training tend to frustrate the sharecropper, causing him at times to act rashly. On the other hand, the so-called cultured Southerner believes that chain gangs, sweat boxes, and lynchings are sure ways of correcting a bad deed or poor judgment. In Paul Green's folk plays, the enlightened aristocrat with his fanaticism, religious beliefs, and barbaric tendencies is contrasted with the less fortunate folk with their common sense, superstitions, and desire for equal opportunities. Just as the contrast of wealth and poverty is evidenced in nearly all of the folk plays, so too do they make use of contrasts of culture and barbarism. Particularly important statements on these cultural and barbaric aspects of the South may be found in "Supper for the Dead," "The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock," "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin," "The Old Man of Edenton," "The No

'Count Boy," "In the Valley," "Quare Medicine," "Unto Such Glory," "The Lord's Will," "The Prayer Meeting," "Your Fiery Furnace," "Sam Tucker," "Saturday Night," "The Cornshucking," "The Hot Iron," Johnny Johnson, Roll, Sweet Chariot, The Field God, In Abraham's Bosom, Native Son, and The House of Connelly.

It is apparent, however, that the basic conflict in Paul Green's folk plays is that between the black man and white man, often evidenced in the mulatto who is living exemplification of the incompatibility of black and white blood. From this struggle tragedy generally results. With few exceptions the mulatto (always in Green's work a product of the lust of the white man) meets his downfall through conflict with the white man, and although that fall comes from the deficiencies and frustrations of the individual in his unfortunate circumstances, the primary cause of the tragedy lies at the feet of the white man. Certainly all the plays touch upon the basic conflict, and a number of them deal extensively with contrasts between black and white: "Your Fiery Furnace," "In the Valley," "The Goodbye," "White Dresses," The House of Connelly, In Abraham's Bosom, and Roll, Sweet Chariot.

The contrasts of wealth and poverty, culture and barbarism, white and black are vividly and dramatically revealed in these plays and will be considered in detail in the following chapters.

# CHAPTER II

# WEALTH VERSUS POVERTY

Beginning at the Potomac and Ohio Rivers and stretching down to the Gulf of Mexico, then westward to the borders of Oklahoma and Texas lies a great expanse of land known as the South. Eleven states make up this area of some half million square miles. The population exceeds twenty-five million, of whom approximately one third are Negroes. The two distinct races, white and black, abide in a common geographic background, but cultural and economic paradoxes seem to contradict this homogeneous origin.[1]

The region known as the South can be divided into the fishing section along the coast; the trucking and tobacco and cotton farming section on the northern coastal plain; the citrous fruit, rice, and sugar section farther south; the cotton delta along the Mississippi; and the mineral, textile, and power sections among the hills and mountains.[2]

Since this paper deals mostly with plays which originate in the state of North Carolina, it may be well to mention that approximately two fifths of the state is a vast, fertile coastal plain which stretches inland from the sea to a maximum distance of one hundred twenty-five miles. In this wide expanse, the Negro has done most of the manual labor.[3]

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[1] Paul Green, "Introduction," Out of the South, p. xi.

[2] Ibid.

Since the early twenties an industrialized economy has changed the face of the South and, with it, the people. A report on Economic Conditions of the South, prepared in 1938, says:

> One half of the South's farmers are tenants: roughly, nine million; while another two million belong to wage-earning families on farms. Large plantations worked by machinery have created a class of day laborers subject to hire and fire. Two and a half million houses are substandard. Poverty is widespread and industrial wages are the lowest in the United States. Illiteracy is higher than in any other section of the country.[4]

## Fertile Land and Eroded Land

Paul Green saw the effects of the industrial revolution during his years on the farm, and from those effects he drew material for his folk plays.[5] In a sense, the coming of the machine age made the rich richer and the poor poorer. By the use of machinery, the rich man was able to increase crop production and thus extend his boundaries. The sharecropper worked and struggled with hoe, rake, plow, and mule to make a bare living but was never able to secure more than the necessities of life; culture was unobtainable.

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[3] Paul Green, "Introduction," Lonesome Road, p. vii.

[4] Felix Sper, "The Negro Theme," From Native Roots, p. 129.

[5] See above, p. 7.

These extremes of wealth and poverty are evinced in The House of Connelly (1931).[6] In the play a decaying aristocratic family obtains wealth through the hard labor of the sharecropper and the Negro folk. In former days the Connelly household has enjoyed social prestige while domestic duties have been performed by Big Sue and Big Sis, two Negro women. As the Connelly household decays within, the land begins to wear out and debts begin to mount. The sharecropper finds himself working longer hours to supply the aristocratic family with their usual accessories while food, clothing, and shelter grow scarce in the poorer household. A young heir to the Connelly plantation, William Connelly, is unable to organize and govern the estate to make it successfully produce, until young Patsy Tate, a daughter of one of William Connelly's tenants and a girl who loves the land itself and falls in love with William, takes the responsibility of assigning definite tasks to the many tenants on the farm. Through the labors and brains of a tenant girl, who persuades William to marry her, a decaying aristocratic plantation is made again to produce and proudly take its place in a new South. The work still remains for the sharecropper, and a properly cultivated land is made to produce enough for the wants of all. Yet the tenant continues the backbreaking work with only the necessities of life.

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[6] Unless otherwise specified, the dates given in this work are dates of publication.

Unlike William, who depends chiefly upon Patsy, Hardy Gilchrist, a muscular young man in The Field God (1927), is a proud owner of a large farm. Because of his good health and strength he drives himself with work from four o'clock in the morning until night. His tenants are expected to do an equal amount of work. For them food, a place to sleep, and more work are to be compensations for wearing out their bodies and making the landowner richer.

Colonel McCranie, an owner of slaves, enjoys leading the life of a Southern gentleman in In Abraham's Bosom (1927) while the Negroes work backbreaking hours in the turpentine woods. A worker who errs is horsewhipped by the colonel, who is a highly respected man in the community. Through the work of the tenant the McCranie family is able to sustain social prestige by their evidenced wealth. Fortunately for the laborers the land yields her fruit through the skillful care of the tenant.

While the large plantation owner enlarges his storehouses, the tenant farmer struggles with his eroded land. When prices for cotton and corn are up, the land ceases to yield, and as prices recede the worn land reluctantly gives up a bountiful harvest. "Fixin's" (1924), a one-act tragedy about a tenant farm woman, portrays the struggles of a young married couple. The "high" price the couple receive for their cotton (thirty cents a pound) is caused by the boll weevil's destruction of crops in Texas. Even when prices are at their best, the man and woman remain in poverty. Although the husband cannot afford property, in order to buy land he wants to save every dollar he makes. However, his wife wants to spend her share of their money on domestic necessities. When talking to a land owner about a down payment on the land, Ed Robinson, the tenant, says, "Lilly ain't tuck with farming no more. In place of land, she wants to buy fixin's and sich, and purty up the house. Wants to buy furniture, and graffyfoans, and lace curtains, and the like."[7] The woman's poverty and her desire for household necessities and social life caused her to become discontented with farm life. After a time the continued denial of these simple necessities and human cravings brings on a domestic break, and Lilly Robinson goes to the city, where she can be treated like a woman and enjoy the fulfillment of her domestic desires.

In "The Humble Ones" (1928) Lettie and Ollie have just been married by a justice of the peace. They drive back in the evening to their little home in the fields and cook their first supper.

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[7] Paul Green, "Fixin's," Carolina Folk-Plays, second series, edited by Frederick Koch, p. 86.

> They . . . /do/ not see that the ominous years . . . /are/ just beginning their march upon them, bringing for their defenceless heads frosts and black disasters, poverty and sweat, toil and disease, and processions in the graveyard, . . . these being prepared for their great suffering.[8]

For a time the young couple prosper and bring children into the world. Some of the children die and others are born to replace them. After a few years, crops begin to fail and food becomes scarce. Longer hours of toil seem only to break down the exhausted body, and the land ceases to give forth the expected harvest. Lettie acquires a tumor on the spleen which cannot be removed, and the family's savings are disbursed in an effort to make his last days comfortable. Ollie has a mental breakdown caused from the strain of work and the rigors of childbirth. Debts increase, the land goes untended, and the grave takes its toll.

## Easy Living and Killing Work

Although the machine age lessens the work of a few, easy living continues to be bought with hard labor. Henry Dalton, a capitalist in Native Son (1941), represents excessive wealth and his laborers extreme poverty. Dalton is able to afford a mansion, servants, Cadillacs, and all the domestic conveniences possible through unbearable working conditions to which he subjects his employees in his factory.

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[8] Paul Green, "The Humble Ones," Wide Fields, p. 139.

Dangerous machinery, like exposed saws, drills, and revolving belts and chains, causes employees to lose working hours because of injuries. Many times workers are permanently disabled or killed on the job. Defective work caused by long working hours imposed on employees results in their being fired. Poor ventilation produces disease, but production must be increased regardless of the cost in human lives. A housing district in a slum area brings the capitalist many additional dollars because of the high rent he demands while tenants live in the mire of the housing units. There are no plumbing nor heating facilities. People live in the worst of unsanitary conditions. Buildings are so crowded together that the sun cannot shine on the streets. People rot and die from disease while Henry Dalton enjoys easy living and the highest respect of a blind society.

A similar condition exists in _The Enchanted Maze_, which was published in 1939. A highly respected capitalist endows a college with large sums of money for the honor and glory of self while, several blocks from the distinguished college campus, working conditions equal to those in _Native Son_ exist in his own factory.[9]

Easy living is obtained by the land owners in _The House of Connelly_, _The Field God_, and _In Abraham's Bosom_. _In Abraham's Bosom_ will be examined later in detail.[10]

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[9] See above, p. 30.

[10] See below, p. 87.

Old Wash Lucas, a miser in "Old Wash Lucas" (1920), lives a retired life with his thousands of dollars locked in a small steel box which he keeps near him at all times. Because of the work to which the miser has subjected his body in earning his savings, he is affected with paralysis and has to be tended by his daughter. Being obsessed with his money and the memory of his hard working years, he refuses to help his son's family, which is dying of starvation and sickness. Medical attention cannot be secured without money. A clever banker persuades the old man to place his savings in the bank for protection. The following day the bank closes because of the depression. When the diseased old man decides to help his son, it is too late. The son's wife dies before Old Lucas can make a decision. Then knowledge comes that the bank is closed, and the old man dies in his misery. Easy living is paid for in sickness and death.

## Plantation Owner and Sharecropper

While there are those who manage to have a so-called "easy living," there are thousands who remain victims of heavy, exhausting work which is brought about by the tyrannical Southern aristocrat. Paul Green must have observed excessive drudgery resulting from the blindness and prejudice of a democratic society because many of his plays deal with that unpleasant phase of life. In Abraham's Bosom,[11]

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[11] See below, p. 91.

"In the Valley," and "The Hot Iron" contain numerous examples of toilsome work.

"The Hot Iron" (1926), a tragedy of Negro degradation, shows an abandoned Negro woman and her three children in the agonizing clutches of poverty. Tilsy McNeill works in the fields by day and takes in washing and ironing in the evenings to have a sufficient amount of money to care for her three children. She needs dental attention, but since there is neither time nor money for medical care, she must continue her never-ceasing struggle for survival. While ironing one day, she drops the iron on her hand from exhaustion but continues ironing; the "good" white people must have their ironed clothes before the woman can obtain a bit of fat side meat for the children. In her extremity the woman has given the kitchen stove in payment of doctor bills. While she is ironing, her trifling husband Will comes and demands food and the five dollars which he has paid on the missing stove. After a long harangue in which the woman refuses to bed with her delinquent husband, she kills him with the hot iron as the white lady's clothes go up in flames. Thus ends the tragedy.[12]

It appears from Paul Green's writings that "the tenant's extremity is the aristocrat's opportunity." The Field God's leading character, Hardy Gilchrist, expects his tenants to pull as much fodder as he, with fat side meat as a reward. Gilchrist becomes wealthier and the tenants older and poorer. The struggle of capitalist and employees in The Enchanted Maze (1939) is a similar one. The conflict between wealth and poverty is further treated in In Abraham's Bosom.[13]

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[12] A related treatment of killing work as presented in In Abraham's Bosom will be fully discussed in a later chapter. (See below, p. 96.)

The House of Connelly is a study of the disintegration of the old South through one of its proudest families, and the promised ascendancy of the new South through the breaking down of class prejudices.[14] It is a play that springs perhaps from native American traditions and circumstances. The theme of the play is the need for new blood, new energy, and a sense of realities to restore the disintegrated aristocracy of the far South. The plot built around this theme concerns the weakling son of a proud old family who sees everything going to pieces about him and also feels his own character disintegrating. The son, Will Connelly, meets the daughter of one of his own tenants, Patsy Tate, a vigorous and aggressive girl who can help him obtain the qualities he lacks. The household consisting of the old mother, two unmarried sisters, and an uncle object to Will's interest in the girl. Having broken down lusts and a knowledge of where the family is drifting, the uncle advises Will to marry the peasant girl and let her help him get the plantation on its feet. The three women of the family oppose the idea of marriage with poor whites. The mother wants her son to marry a young lady visitor from Charleston, South Carolina, but the match does not come off. After the uncle's lustful past is exposed, he commits suicide and the mother dies from the shock. Will finally falls in love with Patsy and she with him. After the marriage, even his sisters desert the house, feeling that he has disgraced the family. New blood has now come into the Connelly stock, and the land is made to produce again. Paul Green says that "it was cued out of life." He says:

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[13] See below, p. 87.

[14] Burns Mantle, "Paul Green," Contemporary American Playwrights, p. 74.

> Patsy Tate, the young heroine in the play, represents the creative process of life and the brave optimism of youth for a new day. In the tragic ending she was set upon at the gay proud moment of her existence (her wedding night) and murdered by two old ignorant and jealous household Negro servants--goddesses of the Southern hearth, protectors of the old way of life and enemies to the new. So Patsy Tate represented the fresh young South destroyed by the old. And there are plenty of particular instances below the Mason and Dixon line where this sort of thing has occurred and keeps on occurring.
>
> But I decided against this cruel pathos ending. I chose another. This optimistic ending was likewise cued out of life. For often here in my land new ways have taken hold and produced new and better conditions. There is now obvious everywhere a young and vibrant South, creative and fresh and on its way to mighty things. So that was the kind of ending I chose, and I let Patsy Tate live.

> And in her living she showed her mettle as mistress over the household and its rebellious servants.[15]

In "Fine Wagon" (1924) a college professor storms out at a lowly tenant and his son who struggle with a broken-down wagon and team of mules trying to move wood for the teacher at the price of fifty cents a day. The tenant is attempting to make a good start in life despite his extreme poverty. The professor becomes enraged because his sleep has been disturbed at eight o'clock in the morning by the tenant's talk and the creaking of the wagon's iron wheels. Because the wagon breaks down from the heavy loads of wood, the man and son are fired. They are driven in defeat from the professor's yard into the world with only a future of more poverty, and death.

Paul Green expresses the convictions of a defeated man in "Sam Tucker":

> Ignorance means sin, and sin means destruction, destruction before the law and destruction in a man's own heart. . . . What is freedom of the body without freedom of the mind? It don't mean nothing, it don't exist. What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. And I cry out education.[16]

The same despairing cry is voiced by the character of Abraham McCranie in "Your Fiery Furnace."

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[15] Paul Green, Dramatic Heritage, p. 82.

[16] Paul Green, "Sam Tucker," Poet Lore, XXXIV (June, 1923), 222.

The plantation owners are the men who grow rich, are merry for a few years, and then are brought low by the extravagances of their lusts. Destruction is their end. Hardy Gilchrist meets his destruction in The Field God (1927) through his lust for his wife's niece. Colonel McCranie succumbs to defeat through his lust for another race in In Abraham's Bosom. The old Connelly family in The House of Connelly is in rot and degradation because of family deceitfulness.

Although there is the tenant whose ultimate end is defeat brought about by poverty, heartache, disappointment, sickness, and death, the South has its prosperous, happy, and healthy sharecropper who finds sufficient rewards for his labors. "Saturday Night" is the story of humble white folk who enjoy playing games, singing, and dancing. John Day, a farmer, is anxious to marry his daughter off to his young neighbor Joe Harwell, who is in love with the farmer's daughter Polly. Because Joe is too shy to ask Polly's hand in marriage, John Day persuades a neighboring fiddler to come to the house on a Saturday night and play some spirited game and dance music. Although fiddle playing is against the household's religious beliefs, it is relied on as a last resort to prompt and strengthen the heart of the young man. The music succeeds in putting the young neighbor in a state of ecstasy. He kisses the girl in the presence of all the neighbors, and John Day concludes, "A fiddle's good for something after all."[17]

Gone is the old South and, with it, a world once considered unalterable. Economic causes have been largely responsible. As a result, the inrooted devotion of old families to the homestead has run to seed. In The House of Connelly everything exudes decay, and there is "the rot of death in the air." The Connellys are shabby and solitary aristocrats who cling to an old way of life in their onetime mansion set on two thousand acres of land. Then along comes Patsy, land-hungry and bubbling with life, who unites with the son of the house to remake the farm. Slowly the elders drift away one by one. A new generation sweeps out the old, and life takes on fresh vitality.[18]

## Summary

The plays discussed in this chapter reveal Paul Green's belief that the wealth of the landowner is obtained through exploitation of the sharecropper and employee. An aristocratic family in The House of Connelly obtains wealth through the hard labor of both black and white sharecropper and Negro day laborer. In The Field God a wealthy landowner drives himself and his tenants from morning until evening striving to enlarge his storehouses. An aristocrat in In Abraham's Bosom leads the life of a Southern gentleman while his slaves work backbreaking hours in the turpentine woods. Excessive wealth causes capitalists in Native Son and The Enchanted Maze to become greedy for money and negligent of needs of their employees. Wealth and easy living are obtained by the Southern aristocrat and capitalist by keeping the poor in subjection. Paul Green expresses his belief that the Southern landowner and capitalist become richer through their abuse of the sharecropper, slave, tenant, and employee. Poverty and death are the poor man's wage.

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[17] Green, "Saturday Night," Out of the South, p. 100.

[18] Sper, "The Negro Theme," From Native Roots, p. 127.

In "Fixin's" poverty causes a wife desiring domestic conveniences and social life to leave her husband. Hard work in eroded fields in "The Humble Ones" results in untold physical suffering and death. Conversely easy living in "Old Wash Lucas" is paid for in sickness and death. In "The Hot Iron" poverty and degradation cause a woman in her extremity to kill her husband. Thousands of people are the victims of heavy, exhausting work which is brought about by the tyrannical Southern aristocrats. "Fixin's," "The Humble Ones," "Old Wash Lucas," and "The Hot Iron" contain numerous examples of toilsome work which result from the actions of wealthy Southern landowners.

Extremes of wealth through aristocratic domination may be found in The House of Connelly, The Field God, In Abraham's

Bosom, Native Son, and The Enchanted Maze. The well-to-do obtain wealth by keeping the tenant, slave, and employee in submission. Their reward is physical suffering and death, as evinced in "Fixin's," "The Humble Ones," "In the Valley," and "Fine Wagon." In Paul Green's South the wealth of a few results from impoverishment of many.

# CHAPTER III

## CULTURE VERSUS BARBARISM

While the South has struggled under the influence of wealth and poverty with its poor wages in the midst of plenty, its ignorance at the door of opportunity, its killing work and easy living, its eroded and fertile land, men continued to rise above it all. With the increase in the perplexities of living, both nationally and internationally, some Southern men have continued to think. Although increased cultural opportunities are daily opened to them, there are still tendencies in Southern society which lend themselves to barbarism in the form of fanaticisms, superstitions, religious conflicts, lynchings, and blinding ugliness in living. While wars have sometimes blinded men and confused their ideals, the world still has its John Does, or Johnny Johnsons, as Paul Green prefers to call them. In this world of confusing and perplexing tendencies there are men who still strive toward high ideals, undaunted by the enigmas of our civilization.

### Common Sense and Fanaticism

In _Johnny Johnson_ (1937) Paul Green creates human beings "fresh and sweet, odd, right, and sufficiently strong."

Johnny Johnson, a man of common sense, is a "vindication of the human whim and sincerity, simple passion, clear oddities of a single pure heart and a single brain."[1] Paul Green chose to write a play with a theme of war based on the ideals of Woodrow Wilson because Wilson was the first man to speak a social idea that was heard around the world. Johnny Johnson was chosen to represent Wilson's ideas and ideals. The character is named Johnny Johnson because records show that there were 30,000 Johnsons in the American Army of World I and that 3,000 of those were John Johnsons. Green likes to think of the play as "the musical autobiography of a common soldier whose natural common sense runs counter to a sophisticated civilization. The first act is a comedy, the second a tragedy, and the third a satire."[2]

The play opens with a celebration of a monument to peace, with the mayor presiding, and the monument's sculptor, Johnny Johnson, standing shyly by. Word comes during the ceremony that President Wilson has declared a state of war between the United States and Germany. Except Johnny, all run to register loyalty. The girl he loves, Minnie Belle Tompkins, wants him to enlist, but he refuses on the assertion that fighting is unjust "unless you know what you're fighting for."[3] It is not until he reads President Wilson's proclamation of war that he knows his country's purpose in fighting. The announcement said:

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[1] Stark Young, "Mr. Collins and Johnny," The New Republic, CXXXIX (December 9, 1936), 179.

[2] "Johnny Johnson," News Week, VIII (November 28, 1936), 19.

> We have no quarrel with the German people. It's their leaders who are to blame. Drunk with military power and glory, they are leading the democratic people of Germany as well as the whole world into shameless slaughter. This is a war to end war.[4]

Johnny immediately enlists with all the vigor and fervor of a patriotic citizen. Off at the front lines he volunteers, and draws the lot, to go out and take a sniper who is hiding in a cemetery in a large statue of Jesus. Johnny finds that the sniper is only a young German boy and does not kill him but sends him back to the German lines with pacifist bulletins which declare that the Americans do not hate the German people and are as anxious as they to end the fighting. Johnny is then wounded by another sniper and is taken to a hospital but finally escapes with a tank of laughing gas which he administers to the high allied council until they sign an armistice, but they recover in time to order an army attack as scheduled, and Johnny is sent home to an asylum. While there, he loses his fiancée, who has nothing better to do than marry his old rival, Anguish Howington, who evaded army service by temporarily blinding himself with a pair of ill-fitting glasses. In the asylum he organizes a debating society before which he argues for world peace. Against his will he is freed from the asylum, being declared sane, and begins selling toys on the street. It is here that Johnny sees the woman he loves and talks with her child, who is a Boy Scout. The boy gives Johnny, now age fifty, a nickel, which is his good deed for the day, and explains that he too intends to be a great soldier someday. Johnny suggests that the boy do something else with his life which might be useful in the world.

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[3] Paul Green, "Johnny Johnson," Out of the South, p. 413.

[4] Ibid., p. 420.

Paul Green achieved the task of combining tragedy, comedy, and satire in Johnny Johnson. In a comical scene Private Johnson is seen ordering the Allied High Command to stop the war. A scene of tragedy finds him with the Red Cross. The satirical element is manifested when Johnny is under the care of a psychiatrist caricaturing Freud. Although World War I is long past, the ideals and ideas of Woodrow Wilson are still exemplified in the lives of common, everyday men. There are still men who refuse to be daunted by the changing, puzzling conditions which arise from world-wide community living, men of middle-class life but strong in character.[5]

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[5] One critic says that Johnny Johnson is the "story of the average sap, easy-going, faintly idealistic, a tremendous believer in truth and honesty, and what war does to a man like that." ("Haunting Drama," The Literary Digest, CXXIII, January 2, 1937, p. 23.)

Although the man of common sense strives to keep peace in the world and live a successful and useful life which is made easier daily by education offered in schools and that which is accessible by radio and television; by improved means of communication and transportation; by modern home conveniences which leave time for relaxation and study--people continue to live in the clutches of their fanaticisms and superstitions. Because evidences of superstitions and fanaticism are still prevalent in the South, Paul Green has clothed a number of his plays with voodoo practitioners, "conjure women," devils, spirits, "hants," and hallucinations which cause pots, pans, sticks, blankets, and pillows to dance.[6]

"Supper for the Dead," "Blue Thunder," and "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin" have both voodooism and elements of diablerie. "Supper for the Dead" (1926) is the story of a Negro conjure woman's success as she operates with her snaky twin daughters, aged sixty. The woman seeks to effect a confession of guilt from a father who is suspected of drowning his daughter. The old conjure woman is dressed in a dull red flannel dress and walks with a stick. Under one arm she carries a small leather satchel, which contains snuff and a dirty paper bag, which in turn contains herbs, several pieces of white meat, a few frogs, white powder, a handful of hair, and a small egg. With a weird jumble of incantations she makes the father confess that he has raped his own daughter and then has drowned her. In "Blue Thunder" (1928) three women decree that the Great Popper, a powerful, pantherlike fellow with money and a diamond, must not leave his cabin. Their farewell-to-life chant causes sticks, pots, pans, blankets, and pillows to dance. With the coming alive of the objects the braggart is destroyed. The women pick his pockets for money and pull a diamond out of his tooth. An ominous buzzard enters, and the women are trapped. Phantom after phantom appears in "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin." Horror springs from such homely images as a black dog, or an iron-faced man. The story concerns two Negro murderers in a swamp evading capture by a sheriff and his deputy. The two Negroes have killed a man for money and are hiding in a haunted house, hoping that the sheriff and his deputy will overlook their place of hiding because of prevalent superstitions. Neither of the killers trusts the other, and one is killed in a brawl in the house. With freshly spilled blood on the floor of the house, the dwelling again takes on its supernaturalness. Aunt Mahaly, a long dead "hant," evolves from the ground and begins conjuring out of a large black pot in the middle of the room. The door being mysteriously locked, the remaining murderer is unable to escape, and through a series of incantations the old woman calls forth a black dog, an iron-faced man, a little girl with no face, ears, or flesh, a human Jack-Muh-Lantern, a man named Row-Head-and Bloody-Bones, a human Moonack, and a well-dressed business man. The superstitious killer sees these hallucinations because of a blow on the head obtained in the struggle with the other murderer. As a result of these phantoms and a raging storm the killer falls into a stupor and dies just as his place of refuge is discovered by several peace officers.

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[6] Paul Green's plays that deal with superstition, fanaticism, and religious conflict are these: "Supper for the Dead," "The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock," "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin," "Blue Thunder," "The Old Man of Edenton," "Tread the Green Grass," "The No 'Count Boy," "In the Valley," Roll, Sweet Chariot, "Quare Medicine."

In "The Old Man of Edenton" (1920) Paul Green shows how existing native superstitions and foreign religious beliefs in a community can cause unlimited heartaches and suffering to innocent people. Joe Jules, reputed a witchman, is summoned by the governor for putting a spell on the governor's daughter. Jules, a former civic leader, is accused of taking his wife off to Africa, abandoning or killing her, and returning with only an African male slave who worships a wooden idol. The slave's body shows signs of inflicted personal torture to appease the spirits for his sinfulness. When a constable, a notary, and a minister fearfully visit Jules the night before the summons, they learn that he has lived secluded from the world for ten years, striving to protect his wife, who had contracted leprosy while abroad.

During these ten years he has striven to keep the woman from killing herself and him. In the presence of the three town officials the old man permits his wife to stagger into the room. Bound in chains, she appears as white as snow, with nose eaten away, sightless eye-sockets, one empty sleeve, and every vestige of eyebrows and hair gone. The creature remains silent except for a humming sound that issues from her throat. As the woman feels for the spinet that she loved to play in earlier years but has not had access to in the past ten, the old man drinks poison. The slave, incensed by the actions of the townsmen, who have destroyed his idol, sets fire to the house and everyone dies.

Superstitions are further exemplified in "The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock." The play, published in 1928, tells of a rascally, superstitious grandfather who refuses to give his permission for the marriage of his granddaughter to a local youth. Thereupon the couple decide to wring consent by playing on the superstitions of the old man. Dressed in a devil's costume, the lover enters at midnight and scares the old man out of his wits. The man is sure he had died and gone to the lower regions. Being wearied from his frightful scare, the old fellow takes a brief nap. When he awakens he thinks he has died and come to life again and consents to the marriage.

In "Tread the Green Grass" (1926) Paul Green tries to illustrate how sensitive souls are often driven mad in an environment confused with superstitions, legends, and religion. He depicts in an adolescent girl the conflicts between the imaginative longings stirred by her newly-awakened senses and the rigid beliefs and practices of religious morality in which she has been brought up. Her excitable imagination has been fed on folk legends and narrow religious views, and the fantastic mingling of these in her mind forms the play. The young girl, Tina, dreams of witches and gnomes, and of sin and hellfire. Davie, the devil, portrayed as the Ariel of the woods, woos the girl Tina, whose "poor heart is lost in darkness."[7] While paganism is in the ascendant, the countryside sings praises to God and rejoices in His glory. Christianity finally frees Tina from the power of Davie, but in the process of being freed she becomes mad.

In "The No 'Count Boy" (1923), a fantasy, the humdrum relationship between a dreamy maid and her hard-working beau is shattered by the intrusion of a young dreamer who tells strange tales of far-off places. The young dreamer has run away from a neighboring farm and has never been farther from his home than five or ten miles, but his imagination has run until he believes he has seen the world. One evening he comes upon Pheelie, a young girl who has yearnings for travel and adventure. Pheelie is about to go riding with her suitor,

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[7] Paul Green, "Tread the Green Grass," The House of Connelly and Other Plays, p. 243.

Enos, but the "no 'count boy," playing his jew's-harp and telling his strange tales of far-off places, almost persuades the girl to forsake her beau. The young boy tells the girl of Niagara Falls and New York, of trains and rivers, and sings wild songs that enchant her. He tells her that all people are kind and generous and that throughout the world ice cream is given away free.

A vein of superstition runs through "In the Valley." John Henry, a stranger in a boarding house, astonished ten occupants by making prophecies which he pretends to interpret while peering into a coffee cup. All the information which he relates, however, has been obtained from a convict on the roads. His prophecies concern the coming of the convict to the boarding house by night to sleep with his wife, who is in love with another man. He reveals the consequences which are to arise from the visit. Residents in the boarding house believe the stranger to be a "prophet from the land of Canaan."[8]

In Roll, Sweet Chariot (1935) the same John Henry, still a stranger, bewitches members of the boarding house by pulling from a satchel slung over his shoulder a black packet wrapped tightly in a string of yellow hair. Since this play derives from "In the Valley," the revealed information is essentially that of the earlier play.

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[8] Paul Green, "In the Valley," In the Valley and Other Carolina Plays, p. 23.

In "Quare Medicine" (1925) Paul Green discloses another aspect of superstition as examplified in the lives of Southern country folk. In the play a spiritless husband is cured of his timidity by drinking a medicine sold to him by a traveling faker. The husband desires to assert his own power over his wife, who insists on a meticulously clean house. She allows no tobacco juice to be spit into the fire nor dirty work clothes to be worn in the house. Doctor Immanuel, the faker, persuades the head of the house to drink a red medicine filled with life and power. After taking the red liquid, the husband goes into a rage which startles even the doctor. In a fury the husband seizes a bottle of gray medicine that is to make all who drink meek and gentle and pours it down the throat of his hysterical wife. Terrorized by the strength of her husband, the wife begs forgiveness for her tyranny and permits tobacco spitting and the wearing of dirty clothes in the house. The faker hastily leaves, and the married couple again are happy.

As society has become better educated and more tolerant, men have become conscious of the needs of others and have tried to make opportunities in life available for less fortunate people. In "Your Fiery Furnace" (1926) a man strives to found a school for children who are not so fortunate as to be near an established one. The man believes that "ignorance means being oppressed . . . /that/ the stableness of character is to be mostly built by education . . . [and that] to live good clean lives men must learn."[9] In Abraham's Bosom (1927) portrays a lowly man who founds a school for rural children. The motto of the school is "an idle brain is the devil's workshop."[10] But because of lack of encouragement in the home, the pupils cease coming to school, and its doors are finally shut. Edward Max, an elderly lawyer in Native Son (1941), proclaims that poverty, ignorance, and economic injustice cause people to become frustrated because the newspapers, radios, and educational systems have led men to believe that men are free and equal. People become confused and frustrated when they live in dire, strait circumstances which seem to deny the truth that all men are free. A person becomes stimulated by everything around him to aspire to be a free individual, but poverty, economic injustice and race discrimination cause him to fail in his aspirations. Society is to blame.

In Paul Green's "The No 'Count Boy" (1923) a young dreaming philosopher believes the world to be a place where "everything . . . [is] easy, people . . . [are] good to you; . . . [there is] nothing to do but eat ice cream and maybe now and then drink lemonade. . . . [It's] worse'n . . . [a] fair. . . ."[11]

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[9] Paul Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," Lonesome Road, p. 176.

[10] Paul Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," Out of the South, p. 234.

As society has tried to make free opportunities for all men and as Christianity has spread to the country's rural folk where superstitions had become their standards for living, new conflicts have been added to their environment. Formerly men were terrorized by their superstitions about a black cat, about walking under a ladder, about being haunted by "hants," about being bewitched by old women, and about children being mysteriously marked before birth because of a parent's sin. Now they have become additionally confused through false as well as true religious leaders who have sprung up in communities. Many times religion has caused men of limited knowledge to become crazed and animal-like in their acts through the frustrations arising from their background of ignorance and superstition. Paul Green must have witnessed numerous evidences among his rural folk because some of his plays show a definite sensitiveness toward practices of voodooism and behavior brought about through superstition.

Green treats the subject of religious worship employed as "sex lure and sex outlet" in "Unto Such Glory."[12] In the name of religion a traveling country preacher, who is a pious hypocrite, tries to steal another man's wife. The wronged husband, suddenly inspired by a self-induced spell in which the angel Michael reveals the lustful intentions of the preacher, attacks the minister. The husband declares what message the angel sent: "Brother Simpkins led other women away, don't let him do it again."[13] The preacher is ordered from the house and the woman gains forgiveness from her husband.

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[11] Paul Green, "The No 'Count Boy," _Out of the South_, p. 84.

[12] Felix Sper, "The White South," _From Native Roots_, p. 126.

"The Lord's Will" (1922) reveals tragedy caused by religion and ignorance. Lem, a preacher and tenant farmer obsessed by religion, is "always dribblin gospel from his jaws instead of pickin cotton."[14] He leaves his wife and young child alone in a tenant house while he roams the country preaching to white trash, letting his cotton and fodder rot in the fields. He preaches and gives his money to the poor white while his family goes unclothed and unfed because "it's the Lord's will. The Lord will provide."[15] Because of exposure his child takes pneumonia and dies. His religious beliefs keep her from receiving medical attention. "The . . .

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[13] Paul Green, "Unto Such Glory," Out of the South, p. 286.

[14] Paul Green, "The Lord's Will," The Lord's Will and Other Carolina Plays, p. 24.

[15] Ibid., p. 36.

/Lord/ giveth and . . . taketh away. . . . The Lord'll take care of her. He knows what is best."[16] As a result of the child's death, the mother dies in despair because "it's the Lord's will."[17] This play is one of Paul Green's best examples of tragedy caused by intense yet ignorant religious beliefs.

Another example of religious conflict caused by love, ignorance, and religion is "The Prayer Meeting" (1924). While a grandmother works for the society woman down the road, two girls invite two Negro preachers to come to their house for a prayer meeting. The girls have already lost their chastity because of the influence of the preachers. A few members of the church attend the prayer meeting, which turns into a party of promiscuity. As the religious group is breaking up, the old grandmother unexpectedly arrives at the house. In disgust she hurls a vindictive ultimatum as she drives her granddaughters from the house, "You wuz good gals, but you ain't no mo'! Git from heah, I tells you you rutting bitches, coupling lak goats. Flee out o'dis house, 'fore it falls on you and scrushes you lak hit order. . . . Leave heah, leave heah, and go on and sleep wid . . . /those preachers/ on the rivah bank de way you's planning."[18] The girls leave and the worn-out woman sits sobbing and rocking before a fire, beating her bony hands on the arms of a chair.[19]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Paul Green, "The Prayer Meeting," Lonesome Road, p. 128.

Emphasizing the religious aspect in men's lives is The Field God (1927). The play traces the tragic downfall of Hardy Gilchrist, a successful white farmer and a strong, defiant man who refuses to bend to religion in accordance with the demands of his sickly wife and pious neighbors. When the wife's niece, Rhoda, young and healthy, comes to the farm, the girl and Gilchrist are attracted by each other's strength and fall in love. While they are in the fields one day, their tenants by accident observe the two in an embrace. Word quickly spreads to the narrowly pious neighbors. The wife senses the new-found love between her husband and niece. Venomously jealous, the wife dies, cursing Gilchrist and Rhoda. The two marry, but malicious neighborhood gossip that the two married on top of the dead woman's grave and revivalist meetings to save their souls drive them apart. Gilchrist's crops fail, his hogs die of cholera, and his barns burn. The praying neighbors finally win Rhoda to the church. Refusing to accept the final insult of bowing his will before a selfish and unjust God in whom he cannot believe, Gilchrist commits suicide "in defence against hypocrisy, even his own."[20]

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[19] Barrett Clark calls "The Prayer Meeting" Paul Green's first successful attempt in depicting man as a healthy animal, "neither a downright villain nor a dreamy Uncle Tom sentimentalist." (Barrett H. Clark, "Paul Green," An Hour of American Drama, p. 129.)

## Liberation and Tyranny

While white men have struggled to free themselves from superstitions, ignorance, and religious fanaticism, the Negro also has tried to better himself through his own initiative and liberate his race from its blind ignorance. The aspiring Negro has had a difficult time persuading his colored folk of their need of education. They have lived as slaves working by the sweat of their brow so long that they accept their plight as a matter of course. Young children have been taught that "de . . . way t' git long in dis country is live on bended knee."[21] When members of the younger generation have caught a vision of the necessity of learning and have tried to help their people, they have found themselves faced with untold criticism and mockery from their own race. They have, nevertheless, been willing to endure slander in an effort to raise their race's standard of living. In "Sam Tucker" a young aspiring teacher practices a speech on the necessity of education before trying to persuade colored parents to send their children to school.

> Ignorance means sin, and sin means destruction, destruction before the law and destruction

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[20] Paul Green, Dramatic Heritage, p. 82.

[21] Ibid., p. 88.

> in a man's own heart. . . . Through war and destruction we were freed. But it was freedom of the body and not freedom of the mind. And what is freedom of the body without freedom of the mind? It don't mean nothing, it don't exist. What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. . . . I cry. . . education and free thought and living moral lives.[22]

A similar theme is exemplified in "Your Fiery Furnace."[23] In In Abraham's Bosom a young, Negro teacher finds his people barred from his classroom because the colored folk "won't stand for no nigger beating their young'uns."[24] The colored community feels that beatings are privileges of the white man. They feel that education is unnecessary because the child's place is in the fields.

Although the majority of the Negro race have been content in their ignorance, superstitions, and poverty, others have tried to rise toward better things. In an effort to soar above adverse circumstances, such Negroes have brought the wrath of angry mobs upon themselves. Many times ignorance has been the cause of mob violence. Abe, in "Your Fiery Furnace," is lynched after a moment of blind frustration in which he kills his landowner, who had taken away Abe's crop because of his negligence. No trial is held to obtain the facts and give the accused an opportunity to explain or defend himself. He is called forth onto the front porch of his house and shot down. Paul Green deals with a theme similar to this lynching scene in In Abraham's Bosom.[25]

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[22] Paul Green, "Sam Tucker," Poet Lore, XXXIII (June, 1923), 222.

[23] Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," p. 117.

[24] Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," p. 238.

While the Negro has attempted to liberate himself from the shackles of ignorance and gain equal opportunity in this country, he has fallen prey to mob violence. As a young Negro boy stands trial for the murder of a girl, an angry mob in Native Son clamors for possession of the boy outside the courtroom so that they may "string him up." The mob fails to secure the victim, but the judge pronounces the death penalty in the electric chair.

## Beauty and Ugliness

While reading of man's aspirations for the finer things of life, his struggles with nature, and his superstitions, philosophies, and conflicts caused by his ignorance and poverty, one does not fail to see beauty as well as ugliness in the humblest of lives. Paul Green gives the reader a glimpse of the beauty of living as he permits his characters in "Saturday Night" to sit on a porch and explain the wonderfulness of the universe. Although the farmers possess no modern luxuries, they possess a peace and understanding of nature that comes only from high thinking and clean living. Objects of nature become dear to them. They enjoy listening to the fast-growing corn as its joints pop on a warm spring evening. The voice of the whippoorwill is music to the villagers' ears. Moonlight, stars, and the Milky Way are a constant source of inspiration to the farmer as he gazes into the heavens. The birth of a new calf brings a sense of delight to country folk. The farmer's thoughts of carefully tilling the soil in the summer's heat give him a sense of pride. At the end of a week ice cream, friends, and a fiddle permit opportunities for reminiscing over days of former years and prompt moments of joviality.

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[25] Ibid., p. 267.

In "The Cornshucking" (1928) the dramatist emphasizes neighborliness and its usefulness in making difficult work easy. When friends gather for corn husking, the women folk cook large quantities of food for their working men. Young and old enjoy exchanging tall tales and playing games. Every farmer has a big fish story. Work is turned to play in corn shucking as young and old enjoy the evidenced romance exemplified between boy and girl when a red ear of corn is found. This affords embarrassment on the part of the young but produces hearty laughter from the old.

Despite all its conflicts and suffering, Native Son shows how a blind woman enjoys the beauty of nature in tending her flower garden. In her blindness life, exemplified in her plants, becomes a thing of beauty and joy.

The reader sees beauty and simplicity in the old Negro mammy in Native Son as she labors in a slum area of Chicago where the sun seldom shines. She strives to rear her children by the motto, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."[26] The woman works to keep a neat apartment, and although food is rationed to them through relief work, she tries to give her offspring the best in life. Her daughter attends sewing classes. A single red geranium growing in a pot on the window sill signifies the Negro mammy's purpose in life.

Beauty in the earth itself is seen by Patsy Tate in The House of Connelly (1931), who yearns to see the ill-cared-for land properly cultivated and made to produce a bountiful harvest. Because of the love for the land, she marries the owner to remake the farm.

## Summary

In Southern society Paul Green sees barbarism as it is expressed in fanaticism, superstition, religious conflict, lynchings, and blinding ugliness in living. Green believes that the half-taught whites purposely use less fortunate untaught folk for their own personal gain. War is shown in Johnny Johnson to be a profitable enterprise for the military man at the expense of the common soldier's life. Private Johnson's natural common sense runs counter to a sophisticated civilization. War to Paul Green is only wasteful to man.

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[26] Paul Green and Richard Wright, Native Son, p. 1.

Since Green's plays reveal his belief that ignorance results in superstition and fanaticism, he sees these elements still prevalent in a relatively uneducated South. In his plays is an army of voodoo practitioners, "conjure women," devils, spirits, "hants," and hallucinations.

Green makes a point of the fact that the frustration of ignorant folk laden with superstition and fanaticism is usually intensified by the religious instruction they receive. If the people cannot be properly educated, they are better off without Christianity. The pagan should be allowed to worship his gods in his honest, ignorant way. Inadequate instruction confuses the minds and hearts of the ignorant and results in the destruction of the individual.

In "The Old Man of Edenton," Paul Green shows how superstitions and primitive religious beliefs in a community can cause unlimited distress and sorrow to innocent people. The evil of superstition is exemplified in "The Man Who Died at Twelve O'clock." In "Tread the Green Grass" he illustrates how sensitive souls are often driven mad in an environment confused with superstitions, legends, and religion. Green makes an issue of the fact that barbaric actions and frustrations arise from the fusion of religion with the superstition and fanaticism of unlearned folk. Religion becomes a vice rather than a virtue. A stranger at a boarding house in "In the Valley" astonishes occupants by making prophecies which he pretends to interpret while peering into a coffee cup.

Although Green usually sees nothing but evil as a result of superstition, he recognizes the possibilities of its being turned ironically to good. In "Quare Medicine," he allows a spiritless husband to be cured of his timidity by drinking medicine sold to him by a traveling faker.

In "Unto Such Glory" Green treats the subject of religious worship employed as "sex lure and sex outlet." A slightly different approach to the evils resulting from distorted religious views is expressed in "The Lord's Will." In "The Prayer Meeting" Green fuses the love element with religious conflict. Emphasizing the religious aspect in men's lives is The Field God. A defiant man refuses to bend to religion in accordance with the demands of his sickly wife and pious neighbors.

Despite the frustrations caused by religion, superstition, and fanaticism, the Negro has attempted to better himself through his own initiative and liberate his race from its blind ignorance. Through Negro leaders in "Sam Tucker," In Abraham's Bosom, and "Your Fiery Furnace," Green declares the necessity of education. When the Negro has endeavored to liberate himself from the shackles of ignorance and to gain equal opportunity, the white man has refused him the privilege. The Negro liberator usually dies for his presumption in trying to educate his fellows.

Yet as society has become better educated and more tolerant, Green realizes that men have become conscious of the needs of others and have tried to make opportunities in life available to less fortunate people. In "Your Fiery Furnace" Abe is the spokesman for Green when he declares that "ignorance means being oppressed . . . that the stableness of character is to be mostly built by education." In Native Son Green's mouthpiece is an elderly lawyer who proclaims that poverty, ignorance, and economic injustice cause frustration and confusion in people who are told that all men are free.

Green also gives the reader a glimpse of the beauty of living when he permits his characters in "Saturday Night" to sit on a porch and marvel at the wonders of the universe. In "The Cornshucking" the reader becomes aware of a neighbor's sense of duty and the pleasure derived from work. A blind woman in Native Son enjoys the beauty of nature by tending her flower garden. In the same play a single red geranium growing in a pot on the window sill symbolizes a Negro mammy's purpose in life.

Paul Green's plays tell us that until both white and black men in the South are properly educated, fanaticism, superstition, prejudice, and religious conflict will continue to frustrate and destroy them, and that until cultural opportunities become available to all men, barbarism will rot Southern life.

# CHAPTER IV

## WHITE VERSUS BLACK

While white and black alike have struggled to free themselves from the pitfalls of superstition, ignorance, and religious conflicts, they have not forgotten that black is black and white is white.

> In the so-called humanizing of . . . the vast and fertile coastal plain of [North Carolina] . . . the Negro . . . has borne the brunt of the dirty work. For more than a hundred years he has built roads, leveled hills and forests, plowed the fields, sweated and groaned forth the great brag crops of naval stores, of cotton, tobacco, and corn with little or no reward, material or otherwise. Living in the vilest of huts, the prey of his own superstition, suspicions and practices, beaten and forlorn before God Almighty himself--he has struggled helplessly in the clutch of affliction and pain. He has perished by the thousands in the long servitude of his white master. Unceasingly he has matched his strength with the earth that bore him, going forever in the end to rot unnoticed in the land he'd tilled. Through a few winter rains perhaps a falling head-board strove futilely to tell that he had been, and then the plow passed over him and a hill of corn or cotton flourished from his breast. Such is his story before imagined justice.[1]

In this Christian country justice makes a distinction between races of black and white. Often the Negro has mutely accepted abuse from the white in public but wept in private. The Negro father and son remained silent as the white professor in "Fine Wagon" (1934) commanded them to "take . . . /their/ bundle of trash and clear out." The black man had not been able to afford a new wagon but had bought on credit the best he could, to try to earn an honest living, but the old wagon had not been able to withstand the heavy loads of wood. As the colored man and son left the yard in silence, the professor's last words burned in their hearts and souls ". . . these everlasting Negroes--poverty--trifling!" and when they got home tears took the place of smiles.[2]

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[1] Paul Green, "Introduction," Lonesome Road, pp. xix-xx.

The black man's white Christian masters have never let him forget that black is black and white is white. To maintain supremacy, the white have kept the black in submission. Some of the Negro's brethren have grown used to the idea that, throughout the South, they must cringe and bow and grin. A few Negroes have not been able to tolerate the racial prejudice of the white, especially when colored children too must endure the burden of suffering.

Two courses remain open to the Negro: he can either resist or submit. But when the odds are too strong, resistance is out of the question. Besides, only a few are able to stand up and speak their minds. Prudence, and the necessity of self-preservation, have taught the average Negro to give in.[3]

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[2] Paul Green, "Fine Wagon," _Salvation on a String and Other Tales of the South_, p. 277.

The older generation had shown less open resistance to the white. Bitter trials taught them the necessity of adjusting themselves stoically to acts of injustice. They never forgot an injury. Outwardly faithful and sometimes daringly critical, they waited for an opportunity to hit back.[4] In Paul Green's first version of The House of Connelly (1931), Big Sis and Big Sue, two "good" Negro servants, seek revenge of the wrongs done them by the old Connelly uncle by murdering Patsy Tate on her wedding night.

Inevitably oppression brings resistance. Some people will not be stepped on. In "Your Fiery Furnace" a young Negro who has learned the unjust ways of the white man declares that "de only way t' git long in dis country is live on bended knee."[5] After working on the roads with a chain gang for a year, a young Negro boy in In Abraham's Bosom declares that ". . . /the whites/ got the ups on you to begin with. . . . We're slaves to prejudice on the part of the whites and to ignorance on our part. . . ."[6] Later, he repeats his views:

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[3] Felix Sper, "The Negro Theme," Native Roots, p. 91.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Paul Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," Lonesome Road, p. 194.

[6] Paul Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," Out of the South, p. 253.

> We belongs down wit de pick and de sludge hammer and de tee-iron and de steam shovel, and de heavy things--at de bottom doin' de dirty work for the white man . . . he ain't gwine stand for us to be educated out'n it nuther. He's gwine to keep us dere. It pays him to.[7]

Such statements as this reveal that fundamentally the color question is an economic one. The colored laborer must be kept down to be exploited. Whether the victim of oppression and discrimination resists or yields, the fire of freedom burns like an inner light. The desire for freedom is a precious possession which no man can take away. Uzzell, the seer in Roll, Sweet Chariot (1935), reveals Paul Green's awareness of the secret tension and grief in the heart of the black folk: "Ignorant and blind! Under the tight pot I hear you calling."[8] The white man's complacency is expressed by the judge: "These everlasting niggers, always fighting, always killing. They've got no sense. They'll never have no sense."[9]

A group of convicts work on the roads fourteen hours a day. One Negro, Tom Sterling, cannot stand the long hours of work in the heat. He is unmercifully beaten by a white guard. As the Negro rises from the ground screaming like an animal in his last moment of life, he is shot down by the guard. Immediately after shooting the man, the white guard sympathizes with the laboring Negroes: "Dead as a fly. Something wrong. Wrong here."[10] The white man attempts to obliterate a Negro settlement called Potter's Field in Roll, Sweet Chariot by having a chain gang build a road through the settlement. The fall of a house in the settlement caused by the road blasting symbolizes the disruptive oppression of the whites. That oppression is brought out fully in the final scene where the chain gang digs the white man's road straight through the Negro settlement of Potter's Field. Once under the iron grip of the law the Negro finds nothing but agony, despair, and death. While working on the road John Henry in Roll, Sweet Chariot speaks the feelings of the colored race toward God. ". . . /He/ sits on high, his face from the Negro. The poor and needy cry in vain. . . ."[11]

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[7] Ibid., p. 261.

[8] W. S. Clark II, Introduction to "Roll, Sweet Chariot," Chief Patterns of World Drama, edited by W. S. Clark II, p. 1039.

[9] Paul Green, Roll, Sweet Chariot, p. 84.

Upon the death of Sterling, who is shot by the white guard, piety and faith triumph when Uzzell bursts into a victorious trumpet cry "Dig on the road to heaven!"[12] All the convicts catch his vision and begin to sing their song of salvation in Jesus. It is the climax of an aspiration first uttered by John Henry in the second scene: ". . . the weary struggler must keep climbing."[13] The chain gang scene in Roll, Sweet Chariot is paralleled in "In the Valley." Paul Green uses the characters Bantom Wilson and Tom Sterling instead of John Henry and Tom Sterling.

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[10] Ibid., p. 91.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 92.

[13] Ibid., p. 51.

"Hymn to the Rising Sun" (1936) shows the cruelty of the white man as he beats, smothers, lectures, and bullies a Southern chain gang. The gang is lined up in a long row in the early dawn of the morn to be lectured and punished before being ordered to the railroad to swing a nine-pound hammer and push a wheelbarrow for fourteen hours a day in hot July heat. The prisoners are forced to stand at attention while a young Negro boy smothers in a sweat box because he has fondled his sex organs. Another is unmercifully beaten because he could not roll his wheelbarrow fast enough. After witnessing the death of the "Runt" and the brutal beating of another young boy, the gang is forced to stand at attention and hear the white guard deliver a long harangue on patriotism. He says:

> This is a democracy and democracy means the voice of the people. . . . They march to the polls and elect representatives and they pass the laws to keep the peace, and they pass the laws and they hand the laws over to me and say 'Twenty-nine blows!' Ain't it so? And they tell me to put the Runt . . . in that sweat box in solitary confinement for messing with his private organs. Yessir, they're the folks that fasten chains and shackles around your legs. . . .[14]
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> A nigger's a nigger. . . . And you niggers that's in here didn't have sense enough to know

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[14] Paul Green, "Hymn to the Rising Sun," Out of the South, p. 503.

> that, and so you went around trying to stir up trouble, thinking maybe you were just sunburnt white men and could do as you pleased. . . . A lot of you have been strung up to telegraph poles and the limbs of trees . . . well, you got away easy. This is the ball and chain, the nine-pound hammer, the wheelbarrow, the shovel, the twenty-nine lashes, the seventy-two lashes, the sweat-box, the steel cage, the rifle and the shotgun. . . . You've heard about them two niggers, Shropshire and Barnes, in the next camp down the road. They didn't want to work. Well, old boss Jackson chained 'em up to the bars till their feet froze and rotted with gangrene, and the doctor had to cut 'em off. Ain't that hard? . . . Shows you how hard I could be if I wanted to. . . . Come on, boys, give us a cheer for your country on this Fourth of July! . . . Order of the day . . . certifies that before we set forth to work it shall be the duty of the boss to have a rendition of 'America' sung by the prisoners.[15]

A Negro school teacher in "Sam Tucker" becomes distraught because his colored folk lack interest in education and because the white man insists on keeping the Negro in blind ignorance.

> Ignorance means sin and sin means destruction, destruction before the law and destruction in a man's own heart. . . . A little over fifty years ago the white man's power covered us like the night. Through war and destruction we were freed. But it was freedom of the body without freedom of the mind. It don't exist. What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. And again I cry out education. . . . I've been accused of wanting to make the Negro the equal of the white man. That is false. I never preached such doctrine. I don't say that the colored ought to be made equal to the white in society, now. We ain't ready for it yet. But I do say that we have equal rights to education and free thought and living moral lives. With that all the rest will come. We got

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[15] Ibid., p. 508.

> history to prove it. I say it'll come. Color hadn't ought to count. It's the man, it's the man that lasts.[16]

Some oppressed people are forced to endure hardship in their community, whereas others are able to venture forth to seek "the land of Canaan." A woman in Native Son moves her family to Chicago, seeking refuge because her husband has been lynched. Where she expects to find work, friends, encouragement, and decent living conditions she finds "poverty, idleness, economic injustice, and race discrimination. . . . She finds the violence of degradation from which . . . she has fled."[17] Because of her color the woman is unable to find work for herself or her son and daughter. The family is forced to move to one of the worst tenements with the highest rent and the worst living conditions existing in Chicago. The tenements are owned by a rich capitalist who bleeds the Negroes of their money so that he may return it in the form of charity and obtain a good name for himself from the whites. Bigger Thomas, the woman's son, obtains a job as chauffeur for the daughter of Mr. Dalton, capitalist and owner of the tenements. One night Dalton's daughter is driven home drunk by Bigger Thomas. She forces him to help her to her bedroom. While the two are in the room, they are discovered by Mrs. Dalton, who is blind. In an effort to keep the daughter from exposing his innocent presence in the room of a white girl, the Negro unintentionally smothers the girl with a pillow. Frustrated and crazed with terror, the colored boy disposes of the body in the furnace. Although the boy is put on trial, an angry mob clamors for him that they may hang him. A kind and understanding lawyer tries to plead with a racially prejudiced jury:[18]

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[16] Paul Green, "Sam Tucker," Poet Lore, XXXIII (June, 1923), 222.

[17] Paul Green and Richard Wright, Native Son, p. 126.

> I say that this boy is the victim of a wrong that has grown, like a cancer, into the very blood and bone of our social structure. Bigger Thomas sits here today as a symbol of that wrong. And the judgment that you will deliver upon him is a judgment . . . upon ourselves, and upon our whole civilization. The court can pronounce the sentence of death and that will end the defendant's life--but it will not end the wrong. . . . On a certain day he saw his own father shot down by a Southern mob while trying to protect one of his kind from violence and hate. . . . In this city . . . Bigger Thomas found poverty, idleness, economic injustice, race discrimination and all the squeezing and oppression of a ruthless world. . . . Here he found violence and degradation. . . . He found frustrated life intensified by the cruelty of a blind and enslaving industrial mechanism. It is that way of life that stands on trial today, . . . in the person of Bigger Thomas. Like his forefathers, he is a slave. But unlike his forefathers, there is something in him that refuses to accept this slavery. And why does he refuse to accept it? Because through the very teachings of our schools and educational system he was led to believe that

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[18] Paul Green collaborated with Richard Wright in adapting Wright's novel to the stage. The plea against racial injustices in the play is primarily Paul Green himself voicing his protest against racial bias and capital punishment. The full force of his convictions toward these evils culminates in a speech by Edward Max, a lawyer, as he pleads the case of a Negro boy charged with murdering a white girl.

> in this land of liberty men are free. With one part of his mind, he believed what we had taught him--that he was a free man! With the other he found himself denied the right to accept that truth. In theory he was stimulated by every token around him to aspire to be a free individual. And in practice by every method our social system, he was frustrated in that aspiration. Out of this confusion, fear was born. And fear breeds hate, and hate breeds guilt, and guilt in turn breeds the urge to destroy--to kill. . . . Years ago . . . [our forefathers] . . . built a nation mighty and powerful, the most powerful, the most powerful on earth! Yet to those who, as much as any others, helped us build this nation, we have said, and we continue to say, "This is a white man's country!" Night and day, millions of souls, the souls of our black people are crying out, "This is our country too. We helped build it--helped defend it. Give us a part in it, a part free and hopeful and wide as the everlasting horizon." And in this fear-crazed, guilt-ridden body of Bigger Thomas that vast multitude cries out to you now in a mighty voice, saying, "Give us our freedom, our chance, and our hope to be men." Can we ignore this cry? Can we continue to boast through every medium of public utterance--through literature, newspapers, radio, the pulpit--that this is a land of freedom and opportunity, of liberty and justice for all--and in our behavior deny all these precepts of charity and enlightenment? Bigger Thomas is a symbol of that double-dealing, an organism which our political and economic hypocrisy has bred. Kill him, burn the life out of him, and still the symbol of his living death remains. And you cannot kill Bigger Thomas, for he is already dead. He was born dead--born dead among the wild forest of our cities, amid the rank and choking vegetation of our slums--in the Jim Crow corners of our busses and trains--in the dark closets and corridors and rest rooms marked off by the finger of a blind and prejudiced law as Black against White. And who created the law? We did. And while it lasts we stand condemned before mankind.[19]

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[19] Green and Wright, Native Son, pp. 126-129.

The jury listened to the lawyer, but because of their prejudices and their inability to withstand public criticism, they sentenced Bigger Thomas to the electric chair. The white man's power was again exemplified.

Despite prejudice against him, the Negro still may have the respect and affection of his own people. The mulatto, on the other hand, is accepted by neither and rejected by all. Battling to regain his self-respect in a world of whites committed to prejudice and ostracism, the part-blooded Negro is an object of pity and terror. Green's plays reveal that it is the white man who crosses the color boundary to "mix up" with the black. The white man is usually a man of good standing in a community, often a man of wealth, culture, and prestige. But underlying this veneer of respectability lies a desire to degrade and destroy at the price of lives other than his own. The white man is not willing to face social criticism or ostracism which might be brought about through a lawful union with the black. With his fine clothes, polished manners, and flowery language he is able to woo the young, beautiful black woman to him, leave her with child, and forsake her. Usually the white man will refuse to admit being the father of the newborn child. Sometimes he places the mother and child in a small house on the back side of his farm and permits the mother and child to remain on the farm and work, so long as they stay in their place and cause no trouble. For their labors they are provided a place to live and fat side meat, beans, corn bread, and molasses to eat. There are examples of prosperous white men really loving their black wives and offspring but because of the racial barrier and community criticism, they cannot lawfully marry them. Rather they must marry a beautiful white woman for whom they have no love to preserve their "good" name.

As the mulatto grows up he realizes that he is different: he is neither white nor black. Worse than this, he finds himself unable to accept the average Negro's philosophy that "de only way t' git long in dis country is live on bended knee."[20] He becomes confused when his brothers, sisters, and friends tell him that "we belongs down wit de pick and de sledge hammer and de tee-iron and de steam shovel, and de heavy things--at the bottom doin' de dirty work for the white man. . . ."[21] With his mixture of two bloods the mulatto finds himself isolated between two worlds--the black and the white. He learns through frustrations, heartaches, and disappointments that ". . . /he's a slave/ to prejudice on the part of the whites and to ignorance on . . . /his/ own part."[22]

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[20] Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," p. 194.

[21] Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," p. 261.

[22] _Ibid._, p. 253.

At the climax of The House of Connelly Paul Green reveals that the many mulattoes on the Connelly plantation were the progeny of the lust of an old aristocratic uncle who commits suicide when the truth of their paternity is discovered. None but the silent colored folk and Mrs. Connelly had known the truth. Here was a family with a show of pride, goodness, and justice on the outside but rotten within.

In "Your Fiery Furnace" a mulatto meets defeat at the hands of the whites, who deny him the privilege of educating his black race. Before going to a gathering of Negro folk to persuade them to send their children to school, the aspiring teacher practices his speech before his mother, she herself a victim of the white man's unbridled lust for power.

> Looking over the country, ladies and gentlemen, we see ten million souls striving in slavery, . . . the slavery of ignorance. And ignorance means being oppressed, both by yourselves and by others--hewers of wood and drawers of water.[23]

Abe's statement of the Negro's slavery to ignorance prompts the mother to express the black's attitude.

> Dey hain't nobody in slavery. Ain't been since de surrender, and ef dey is, how come? And I reckon the hewers o'wood and de drawers o'water is 'bout as free as anybody.[24]

After the mulatto finishes practicing his speech, thinking that the black cannot fail to be convinced of their slavery to ignorance and their need for education, the black mother exclaims:

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[23] Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," p. 175.

[24] Ibid.

> It's foolishness, and you knows it. Times you'a learning dat white is white and black is black, and God made de white to allus be bedder 'n de black. It was intended from the beginning.[25]

The mother declares that it is time the mulatto put away his books and foolish notions about education, get a cotton sack and work with the rest of his race; but the white blood in the veins of the man makes him rebel against the white man's racial bias. His aspiration for education and his thirst for opportunity cause him to press on in the face of opposition. Realizing that the black race has been cowed by the white man's power and blinded by the white's declaration that "all /white/ men are free and equal but black don't count,"[26] the mulatto replies to his mother's rebuke:

> We been taught and kept believing that for two hundred years. But it's a lie, a lie and the truth ain't in it. . . .[27]
>
> God A'mighty knows they ain't no difference at the bottom. Color hadn't ought to count. It's the man, it's the man that lasts.[28]

In the meantime, while he is rehearsing, the Negro gathering waiting for the mulatto's speech is run off by a group of white men. Later he is lynched. Paul Green deals with a similar theme in In Abraham's Bosom.[29]

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[25] Ibid., p. 178.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 179.

[29] See below, p. 99.

Quiviene, the keeper of a Negro boarding house in "In the Valley," suffers insults from her own black race as they taunt her about her mulatto offspring. A Negro man ridicules the woman and son in the presence of the boarding house occupants:

> Tell him [the mulatto] 'bout the time them white students came out here and you raised hell with 'em? . . . Tell him 'bout his pa, big man now, standing up high in the state. Going about with the gov'nor.[30]

The only answer that issues from the lips of the black woman is "All done past."[31] Paul Green again uses Quiviene, the old boarding-house keeper, and her illegitimate mulatto son in Roll, Sweet Chariot.

White society's wall of racial prejudice which rejects lawful union with the black has caused the white man to drag the black and mulatto into disgrace and contempt. This usually results in abandonment by the white to escape ostracism by a white society. In "The Goodbye" and "Fare Thee Well" a cultured white man watches his mulatto mistress and her child move to another part of the country to try to "forget it all."[32] He loves the woman and wants to marry her, but society will not accept her. "She's a nigger." Seven years the woman waited for the white man to decide whether he would marry her, as he desired, or marry a white girl whom he did not really love. The man wanted a family and children, but he did not want society "looking down on . . . /him/."[33] The neighbors had threatened to tie the man to a tree and beat him if he married the mulatto. The white man pleaded for the woman to reside nearby where he could look after the mulatto and child but the woman wanted respect. Rather than be looked down upon, she took her son and departed from the man she loved. Her only remark was "Fare thee well, and goodbye."[34]

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[30] Paul Green, "In the Valley," In the Valley and Other Carolina Plays, p. 26.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 305.

In "White Dresses" Paul Green depicts the injustice and cruelty of the white man toward his mulatto offspring and the tragedy of the mulatto's destiny better than in any other play. A white dress presented as a gift by a white boy to a mulatto girl becomes the symbol of tragedy. A young white college boy falls in love with the family mulatto maid, Mary McLean. Against his father's wishes, he decides to marry her. Then on Christmas night he sends the girl a white dress to be worn as her wedding dress. Old Granny McLean, the girl's grandmother, discloses an old scrap of white material which belonged to the girl's mother. Years before, the scrap had been part of a white dress that had been given by the college boy's father to the girl's mother. The boy's father forces the girl to marry a coal-black Negro whom she hates. Prudence counsels that the dress be burned instead of worn. At the end of the play as the mulatto girl sees her plight and sobs brokenly, dark threads in human lives complicated by color and kinship knot into the final line as the Negro granny says, "I knows yo' feelin's child, but you've gut to smother 'em in. You's gut to smother 'em in."[35]

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

In Paul Green's plays the white man's racial bias and his attitude toward colored education, suffrage, marriage, living standards, and work have caused the Negro to believe that his place is "on bended knee."[36] Though free by law, the Negro remains a tool in the hands of the white man. By keeping the Negro in submission, the white man is able to subject him to the whites' terms of freedom. The white man's voice is law to the Negro. Since resistance brings only added misery from the hand of the white, the Negro has learned to submit to the white man's passionate lust for power.

The mulatto is still confused and frustrated with his dual personality. Within, he feels superior to the black; his heart throbs with ambition for himself and his race. Not only does his race squelch his ambitions, but they also mock at his mixed origin. As he turns to the whites, he finds the door of opportunity shut in his face. Because of his frustrations, his actions are rash, often causing the death of a white person; therefore, he is sometimes lynched by the whites. His own actions bring about his fragic downfall, and death is the reward of his once honest efforts.

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[35] Paul Green, "White Dresses," Out of the South, p. 394.

[36] Green, "Your Fiery Furnace," p. 197.

At present the only condolence that can be given the mulatto is that of Granny: "I knows yo' feelin's child, but you've gut to smother 'em in. You's gut to smother 'em in."[37]

In summary, in his folk drama Paul Green has shown the tragedy that results from the South's white man, who is prejudiced against and hostile toward the Negro. His plays point out that in many instances the white man falsely accuses the colored to cover his own sin of the flesh. The mulatto is an object of pity and terror. A product of the white man's lasciviousness, he has to regain his self-respect in a world of whites who have ostracized him and of blacks who despise him. In "White Dresses," "The Goodbye," The House of Connelly, and In Abraham's Bosom, Green shows the misery and injustice which miscegenation brings to the South.

The struggle between white and black and the violence resulting from the brutality and prejudice of the white man are depicted vividly by Paul Green in "Your Fiery Furnace," In Abraham's Bosom, Roll, Sweet Chariot, and "Hymn to the Rising Sun."

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[37] Green, "White Dresses," p. 394.

Green's plays reveal his conviction that the color of a man's skin determines whether he receives justice in the South. In Native Son Paul Green voices his protest against racial bias and capital punishment. The full force of his convictions toward these evils is gathered in a speech given by a lawyer, who pleads the case of a Negro boy charged with murdering a white girl. The black race's wrongs are a symbol of those that have grown, like a cancer, into the very blood and bone of our social structure, and depriving a person of life does not remove these wrongs.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION

Paul Green has written numerous plays dealing with the economic, social, religious, and racial injustices which men endure in the section of the country known as the South. In the preceding chapters it has been shown how Green has portrayed the South as a land split by contrasts: contrasts of wealth and poverty, of culture and barbarism, of white and black races. Contrasts of fertile land and eroded land, killing work and easy living, plantation owner and sharecropper are the South's extremes of wealth and poverty. Southern culture made up of the philosopher, the aristocrat, and the Negro liberator is contrasted with barbarism which evolves from the actions of the fanatic, the Holy Roller, and the avenging lyncher. With the South's increased wealth and poverty, its broadening culture and continued barbarism, conflicts between races or black and white continue to exist. Green presents this picture of the South as an authentic one. Thus conceived, the South is presented in part in all the plays. It is presented as a whole in In Abraham's Bosom. For this reason In Abraham's Bosom serves as a support for all the conclusions of this thesis. This play is Green's South. It is concerned with the groping and defeated effort toward race freedom, growth and opportunity; and its material is full of pain, "deep humanity and inherent drama."[1] The figure who carries the main thread of this theme is a man half-white, half-black, troubled by white nerves and impulses, darkened in his soul by superstitions, weakness, and disease. He is Abraham McCranie, the son of Colonel McCranie and a colored woman; the plot is the study of his trials through life.

As has been shown in Chapter I, Paul Green has presented the South as a country of rich farming land, cultivated in many instances by large plantation owners, who form a Southern aristocracy. Even though the nation has passed the Fourteenth Amendment, which avers that no state can deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, Green's plantation owners keep their tenants in ignorance because the rich and white are, supposedly, superior to the colored man and humble sharecropper. Ambition lurks in the hearts of all people, and adverse circumstances only make some folk more determined to better themselves. More disconcerting than racial and educational bias is the problem of the mulatto, a product of the white man's physical lust. In the mulatto added frustrations arise out of this mixture of blood. While exemplified in the different plays of Paul

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[1] Stark Young, "In Abraham's Bosom," The New Republic, L (March 2, 1927), 46.

Green, the incompatibility of the white man and black man is epitomized in In Abraham's Bosom. The white man's desires and ambitions for education, adventure, and leadership throb in the head of the mulatto while his heart makes him realize that he is neither white nor black. Yet to the white man he is black.

In several plays Paul Green has shown the effects evolving from the power and influence of the rich landowner and the greedy capitalist. Just as in other plays, so in In Abraham's Bosom, the rich Southern aristocrat is contrasted with the poor tenant and sharecropper. One man in In Abraham's Bosom is an epitome of all rich and cultured men of the Southern aristocracy. The aristocratic Colonel McCranie possesses the wealth, culture, countenance, manners, health, barbarity, prejudices, and lusts, all of which qualities are brought out in different "noble" characters of other plays. He is a Southern gentleman, a plantation owner, and an owner of slaves.

The play In Abraham's Bosom begins on Colonel McCranie's plantation in a turpentine clearing in the Carolina woods during the noon rest hour. Three Negro slaves are seen laughing, singing, and quarreling as they eat their lunch and dry sweat from their bodies. Their concerns emerge in their speech: gaining and keeping the favor of the whites, eating well, and sustaining physical strength they can brag about. It was necessary for the Negroes to remain in good standing with the whites, in order to have food, shelter, and security. In Abraham's Bosom is concerned with all of these necessities. Part of the noon hour conversation concerns a mulatto, Abe McCranie, who continues working in the turpentine woods while the others rest. The blacks distrust and despise the mulatto because of his mixed origin. Green believes that the mulatto is a result of the white man's physical lust, and this play, In Abraham's Bosom, substantiates this belief. The Negroes discourage and make fun of all of Abe's efforts to throw off the chains of ignorance and superstition. While they sneer at his ambitions, they respect him for his courage to defy the racial prejudice of the whites. This play shows the mulatto confronted with all the prejudices and injustices presented in other plays. The Negroes laugh at and make fun of Abe because he is interested in establishing a school to educate and enlighten his colored race. Earlier, the mulatto became involved in serious trouble for removing the body of a lynched mulatto.[2] Because of his color, the Negro accused of law violations is not considered deserving of trial by jury. While freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment, he is bound, enslaved, terrorized, and tortured by his white masters. Though oftentimes innocently accused, he finds it easier to submit to a prison sentence than to resist such opposition and often to suffer death. Green's plays show that in self-defense the Negro submits to the white. In the eyes of the white he is considered lower than an animal and for the least provocation or misdeed is killed. In Abraham's Bosom is an example of Green's picture of the white man's tyranny. The blacks realize the power and danger of the presumably superior white man. The white's superiority has been imbedded in the mind and heart of the Negro since the days of slavery, and though free by law, the Negro is still enslaved by ignorance. To maintain self-preservation he has had no alternative but to yield to the whims of the white.

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[2] Green's plays show that lynching through mob violence is an atrocity of the white man.

The Negroes in In Abraham's Bosom say

> 'Twon't do to mess with white folks . . . keep to you work, that's all. . . . Work, work for 'em. Get your money and your meat . . . ask no questions, no sass, keep to you work. Nigger keep his mouth shut, let white man do talking. He safe then.[3]

The blacks have come to believe that the "niggers' place /is/ down /at/ the bottom . . . with their hands and legs, muscle power, backbone, down with the rocks and the shovels and the digging, that's the nigger. White man on top."[4]

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[3] Paul Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," Out of the South, p. 212.

[4] Ibid.

Although the mulatto is half black and half white through no fault of his own, he is despised by both white and black. His white nature tells him to make something of himself, but the black tells him he is foolish and crazy: A constant struggle wars within him, and these struggles as evidenced in Abe McCranie in the play In Abraham's Bosom are sensed by the Negroes in the turpentine woods. The slaves also know that Abe is the product of Colonel McCranie's lustful hour. Paul Green's plays, as shown previously in this study, reveal untold personal tragedies evolving from the white man's lusts and a racially slanted society. Beneath the black man's seemingly indifferent attitude toward the mulatto is one of pity and understanding.

> Abe is bad mixed up all down inside. White and black make bad mixtry. . . . Heart say do one thing, head say another. Bad, bad. The white blood in him coming to the top. That make him want to climb up and do something. Nigger gwine hold him down though. Part of him take after the colonel, part after his muh, division and misery inside.[5]

While most of the colored race have contented themselves in their ignorance, believing the world to belong to the white man, others have attempted to extract themselves from the shackles of ignorance and superstition and have tried to enlighten their race. These ambitious people are usually faced with the complacency of the black folk and prejudices of the white. The latter statement is verified in the play

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[5] Ibid., p. 213.

In Abraham's Bosom. While working math problems during the noon rest hour, Abe McCranie explains that he wants to open a school for colored children. The Negroes' skepticism toward education is voiced by the group: "Give a nigger a book and just as well shoot him. All the white folks tell you that."[6]

As the wealthy have enjoyed their exalted station in society sustained by the efforts of the ignorant and oppressed Negro, and while the white has availed himself of educational opportunities, barbaric actions have continued. This study has shown that in Paul Green's writings the cultured white man, in Southern society, has been guilty of numerous barbarous atrocities. These cruel acts are those of racially prejudiced whites. Paul Green has shown that the Negro has been compelled to work long hours with chain gangs in extremely hot and cold weather. If his body cannot endure the toilsome labor, he is unmercifully beaten by his white masters or placed into a small box to endure the agonies of cramped joints and oftentimes suffocation. At other times he is shot like a dog. On occasions he is beaten for attempting to stand up for his rights--if one considers that he has any. In In Abraham's Bosom Green stresses the contrast between culture and barbarism. A reader of Paul Green is led to feel that at times white skin, wealth, and a little learning make man only more barbaric.

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[6] Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," p. 213.

In In Abraham's Bosom Green seems to illustrate the essentially barbaric nature of the aristocratic plantation owner in his characterization of Abe's white father. When Abe's question concerning prospects for the school are ignored by the father, Abe becomes impudent, and the half-brother threatens him for his persistence in learning. In blind passion the mulatto knocks the white youth down, and Abe is punished by his father with a horsewhipping.

As seen in previous chapters of this study, Paul Green's landowners merely list the results of crop failure and low prices under the column of loss in their ledgers. They have sufficient capital to maintain their usual existence until they reap a bountiful harvest. On the other hand, the sharecropper, as pointed out previously, must live day by day and year by year by the sweat of his brow, on his usual twenty-five acres. Each yearly harvest is important to his existence. When cold and wet weather make his seed rot in the ground and dry seasons fail to produce adequate moisture to germinate the sown seed, the tenant finds only discouragement. Oftentimes the tenant is bound by mortgages, disappointments and heartaches resulting from crop failures, his family's discontent with circumstances, sickness, starvation, and death. In such diverse circumstances tragedy often results. The above-mentioned conditions existing in Paul Green's plays have been illustrated in In Abraham's Bosom. The South also has its successful tenant farmers, who are happy in their ability to make a yearly livelihood and who share in the common pleasures of country life as they meet together to share their work and entertainments: telling tales, corn shuckings, dancing, and big dinners.

Superstitions and religious conflicts are disturbing factors in the lives of Paul Green's Southern folk--particularly the Negro; however, these irrational fears are not excluded from white country folk as well as the black. Green's plays show that beliefs in "hants," goblins, devils, evil spirits, witches, black cats, black dogs, and the like have thwarted the thinking of the rural people, predominately that of the blacks. Paul Green's conviction that the white man's religion does more harm than good to the superstitious Negro is prevalent in many of Green's plays and is re-emphasized in In Abraham's Bosom. Unless the Negro's standard of living is raised and unless he is properly educated, he is, as a superstitious man, more capable of coping with his problems than after becoming additionally frustrated by the white man's religion. Often the fusion of fanaticism and superstition with religion results in tragedy. As it was illustrated in Chapter III, culture and barbarism are violently contrasted.

In In Abraham's Bosom Abe McCranie is bitter about his race's superstitions. The reader sees him married to Goldie, also a mulatto. She has just borne the first of their babies to live more than a day or two. Abe's whole devotion, however, is not to her nor to the child nor to his farm work, but to his books, which seem to him his sole hope for salvation on earth. The family's superstitions are seen as Abe enters the house carrying a hoe from the fields. Goldie and Abe's grandmother believe that bringing a hoe into the house will bring bad luck, but Abe objects, declaring that books say that the "niggers got to get out'n them suspicions and being afraid. Ain't no signs with evil and good in 'em."[7] Opening a book Abe reads:

> The Negro is a superstitious person. There are signs and wonders in the weather, some fraught with evil, some with good. He plants his crops according to the moon, works and labors under the eye of some evil spirit of his own imagining.[8]

His wife and mother speak of seeking salvation in Jesus, but he brushes that aside as superstition.

> God done cuss me and my household. No luck at nothing. Can't raise children, can't raise crop, nothing. Ain't dry weather, wet, ain't wet, dry.[9]

In an effort to hasten his child's expected death Abe bruises its arms by pinching it and is interrupted by the entrance of his white father. Colonel McCranie explains that he has arranged for a Negro grammar school to be established with Abe as teacher and has deeded to Abe the house in which he lives and twenty-five acres of land. The effect of the news liberates the emotional and passionate side of Abe's nature. He abases himself before his wife and child, begs forgiveness for his doubt in God's providence, and accuses himself of blasphemy. In a long speech filled with "Yes, Lawd!" and "Jesus, Jesus," he throws himself upon the mercy of Christ and concludes with the conviction that he has been saved. Finally, he baptizes his young son as if making his offering to some god.[10]

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[7] Ibid., p. 226. [8] Ibid. [9] Ibid., p. 227.

This paper has presented Green's belief that the Negroes' superstitions and religious conflicts are the result of ignorance. This ignorance derives from the white man's refusal to educate the black race. The white knows that education will cause the black to throw off his bondage and demand opportunities equal to those of the white. To be exploited by his white superiors, the black must be kept in ignorance. Green's plays reveal that the pure black has been convinced either by white force or talk that education is for the white, not the black. This study shows that defiance of the white man's beliefs usually brings death. Green's plays emphasize the antithesis of white and black. In Abraham's Bosom is an instance of the

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[10] Ibid., p. 231.

Negroes' struggle to resist the white man's prejudice and to rise above illiteracy. All the obstacles which confront a man of common sense and sincerity, striving to throw off the yoke of ignorance, are implied in the play In Abraham's Bosom. The mulatto is faced with complacency on the part of the blacks and hostility at the hands of the white. Green's plays also show that not all white men have been against the black. Some whites have risked ostracism by their friends in an attempt to help the colored. This is obvious in In Abraham's Bosom. Colonel McCranie acknowledges to the colored race his parental relationship to Abe. He accepts criticism from the whites and erects a school for colored children. His aspiring mulatto son, Abe McCranie, becomes the school's teacher. Following the death of the Colonel, opposition against colored education and Abe is voiced by his half brother, Lonnie McCranie, a white man, and all the colored folk. The attitude of the Negro toward education, apparent in Green's other plays as manifested in earlier chapters of this paper, is illustrated in the words of Abe's son, Douglass, in In Abraham's Bosom.

> . . . We belongs down with the pick and sledge hammer and the tee-iron and the steam shovel, and the heavy things--at the bottom doing the dirty work for the white man, that's it. And he ain't gwine stand for us to be educated out of it neither. He's gwine keep us there. It pays him to. I sees it . . . Pap still keeps on trying to teach that men is

> men. Some white man's gonna shoot his lights out one of these days, see if he don't.[11]

The thorough indoctrination in white supremacy given the black by the white is unmistakable in the sanction by Douglass' grandmother of his belief in the white man's superiority and of the Negro's place in society.

> Time . . . [Abe's] learning that white is white and black is black, and God made the white allus de better's the black. It was so intended from the beginning.[12]

Frustrations resulting from his dual personality of white and black were a constant hindrance to Abe McCranie. He was never successful at farming because he believed that his job was to teach. The motto for his colored race, "We Are Rising," hung from the wall of his room.[13] Later he gave up farming and tried working in mills of the city. In his free time he lectured to groups on the necessity of education of the colored. However, he seldom kept a job long. When he was sassed by a white man, he sassed back. The result was his being run out of town. Many times his family was near starvation. He was disappointed in his son, Douglass, who had come to submit to the white man's code of white supremacy. Green has often shown that the Negro liberator has been misunderstood and opposed by the white. Abe's expressed views in In Abraham's Bosom toward education, opposition, and misunderstandings are a representation of the liberator's honest sentiments in Green. While rehearsing a speech one night, Abe expressed his aims of Negro education.

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[11] Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," p. 261.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

> Looking over the country, ladies and gentlemen, we see eight million souls striving in slavery, yea, slavery brethern, the slavery of ignorance. And ignorance means being oppressed, both by yourselves and by others. . . . The Negro will rise when his character is of the nature to cause him to rise--for on that the future of the race depends, and that character is mostly to be built by education, for it cannot exist in ignorance. . . . We want our children and our grandchildren to march on towards full lives and noble characters, and that has got to come, I say, by education. We have no other way. We got to live and yearn--and think, that's it. A little over forty years ago the white man's power covered us like the night. Through war and destruction we was freed. But it was freedom of the body and no freedom of the mind. And what is freedom of the body without freedom of the mind? It means nothing. It don't exist. What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. And again I cry out, education. I been accused of wanting to make the Negro the equal of the white man. Been run from pillar to post, living in poverty because of that belief. But it is false. I never preached that doctrine. I don't say that the colored ought to be made equal to the white in society, now. We are not ready for it. But I do say that we have equal rights to educating and free thought and living our lives. With that all the rest will come. Them books show it.[14]

Paul Green's plays, as shown in Chapter III, illustrate his belief that degradation has caused human bodies to become warped and human minds dulled. Goldie, Abe's wife, loses her vision of the motto "We Are Rising," but she remains faithful to her husband. Hard work, starvation, and the rigors of childbirth all have left their mark on her as they do on other characters in Paul Green's work who are denied domestic, economic, and cultural advantages. Green's plays reveal that the ugliness in these lives is equalized by the beauty in the lives of those who find pleasure, satisfaction, and contentment in tilling the soil and earning an honest living. Their joy and ecstasy are like nature itself, everlasting. There is a certain beauty, too, about the old Negro aunt of Abe's in In Abraham's Bosom as she toils daily, striving to keep peace and harmony in the family. She observes Abe's unsuccessful attempts to free himself from ignorance and the bias of the whites.

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[14] Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," p. 253.

> They hain't nobody been in slavery since the surrender. If they is, how come? And I reckon the hewers of wood and the drawers of water is about as free as anybody.[15]

Green emphasizes the incompatibility of white and black when he shows Abe forced to flee from town to town because frustration causes him to lose control of himself, and he fights with white men who oppose him. While attempting to speak before a group of Negroes on the importance of their education, he is run off by a group of whites. While hiding in the fields, he is confronted by his half brother. Abe begs for help and is refused. In a struggle which follows, Abe kills his white brother, and his emotions take complete control of him. The world reels about him, and the very trees seem to take the forms of men. Stupefied, he visualizes a lynching party remembered from his youth. He conjures up also a young Negress and a young white man stealing off amorously into the bushes, his mother and father. Even in his confusion, Abe, realizing the import of their act, screams in agony. The mulatto striving to do what is good and upright becomes confused and frustrated by the antithetical black and white natures within him. In In Abraham's Bosom as well as in Green's other plays, these two natures are the result of the white man's impassioned lust, not the black's.

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[15] Ibid.

After killing his half brother, Abe returns home, where he is lynched by a mob of whites as his house goes up in flames; the law does not protect the black man.

From this land of contrasts known as the South, Paul Green has told the story of its people, the white and black. He has depicted them as individuals and human beings, not as types. The South with its wealth and poverty, culture and barbarism, and white and black people continues to be a

> land of poor wages in the midst of plenty, of ignorance at the door of opportunity, of exquisite culture and lewd barbarism, of high birthrates and frightful mortality, of killing work and easy living, of thoughtlessness when thought is needed. . . . Here is the home of the Negro liberator, and the avenging lyncher, the miscegenator and the racial purist, the philosopher and the holy-roller, the man of common sense and . . . /the fanatic/; here the ambitious educator and those who spit on all his efforts, the florid aristocrat and his hungry

> hound dog; here the starveling sharecropper and the machinery plantation; here the home of the first American dream upon this continent--a nation of liberty and free men and justice unto all.[16]

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[16] Paul Green, "Introduction," Out of the South, pp. xi-xii.

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