PAUL GREEN:
FOLK-DRAMATIST,
SOCIAL CRITIC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the extent and significance of Paul Green's social consciousness in his concern for the plight of the black man as revealed in his "Negro" plays. Secondary to the main purpose is to evaluate Green as a folk-dramatist.

The "Negro" plays selected to reveal Green's social consciousness are White Dresses (1920); The End of the Row (1923); In Abraham's Bosom (1926); Potter's Field (1929); Hymn to the Rising Sun (1936); and Native Son (1941). The plays selected to determine Green as a folk-dramatist are Supper for the Dead (1927); The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923); The Hot Iron (1921); In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924); The Prayer Meeting (1923); Roll, Sweet Chariot (1934); and The No 'Count Boy (1923).

The works selected for this study have been those whose themes reveal the extent and significance of Green's social consciousness and those that clearly point to him as a folk-dramatist.

The problems dealt with in these plays are peculiar to the time prior to, and during the time in which the plays were written.

Justification

A study of the selected works of Paul Green today is important

from a standpoint of American Literature. Increasingly, students in the field are giving greater consideration to literature as a form of social expression. Then, it is important from the standpoint of the particular author under investigation because little attention has been given to the social aspects of his works, though he is considered an important author.

The significance of Green may be deduced from the following facts. He is not only a dramatist, but a recognized novelist, poet, and philosopher. His plays and stories have appeared in such distinguished and widely circulated periodicals as The Atlantic Monthly, The Drama, and Poet Lore. The year after receiving the Belasco Cup for The No 'Count Boy in 1925, he was awarded the coveted Pulitzer Prize for In Abraham's Bosom. Both plays have been included for discussion in this study. He was a Guggenheim Fellow for the year 1928-1929. This enabled him to travel for several months in England and on the continent of Europe. Other plays of his, notably The Field God (1927); The House of Connelly (1931); Johnny Johnson (1936); his dramatized version of Richard Wright's novel, Native Son (1941); and Roll, Sweet Chariot (1934) were produced on Broadway. The Lost Colony (1937, the famous outdoor drama of the Roanoke Island Celebration; The Highland Call (1939), the story of local Scottish traditions; The Common Glory (1947), which tells of the realistic foundation of the American dream; and Faith of Our Fathers (1950), which tells of the initial victory of the American dream, are examples of a new expression of symphonic drama. He served as president of the National Theatre Conference for two

years (1941-1942), and in 1941 was elected as a member in the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He served on the Committee for Cultural Affairs for the United Nations; on many distinguished committees, panels, and held membership in organizations of note. He has written many one-act plays, some of which have been translated into foreign languages, and a large number of prose fiction pieces. Several Ph.D. theses have been written on Green and his works: Henry Grady Owens', "Social Thought and Criticism of Paul Green" New York University, 1945; Edward Burke Groff's, "Paul Green: A Critical Study of America's Leading Folk Dramatist," University of Kansas, 1958; Donald Robert Treat's, "Paul Green's Concept of Symphonic Drama and Its Application to His Outdoor Plays," University of Denver, 1963; and Frank Joseph Staroba's, III, "Symphonic Outdoor Drama: A Study of Form in the Plays of Paul Green," Yale University, 1964.

This study is unique in that it is the first known dissertation written about Green's concern for the plight of the black man.

Literary sources available for the study are outlined below. The major sources for the revelation of Green's social consciousness are his books Dramatic Heritage and Drama and the Weather. Barrett H. Clark's Paul Green gives an excellent account of Green's background and social criticism. Boyd Martin described Green's theories and social thought in his Modern American Drama and Stage.

Literature available to show Green's theories of folk-drama are Green's essay entitled "Folk Drama Defined," and his books The Hawthorn Tree, Dramatic Heritage, and Drama and the Weather. A

valuable book on the theory of folk-drama is Frederick Koch's Carolina Folk Plays. Virginia Swain expressed Green's theory of folk-drama in the essay entitled "The Backwood Boy Spurned New York." Agatha Boyd Adams' book Paul Green of Chapel Hill gives an excellent account of Green's early life and his theories of the drama. The above mentioned literary sources were invaluable in the revelation of his social criticism, and in the investigation of his ideas of folk-drama.

Definition of Important Terms

It is necessary to define the following terms for the purpose of clarity:

Folk-drama. Green has defined folk-drama as a type of drama which deals with less sophisticated people, usually with rural or primitive people. The protagonists and characters of such dramas are generally depicted as being close to the conditions and processes of nature and lacking in the more cultured refinements of a higher society.[1] It is an intimate portrayal of the life and character of a particular group of people. The term folk-drama is concerned with native subject matter--with legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. Folk-drama, for the most part, is realistic and human; sometimes it is imaginative and poetic. It is written by one of the folk who has

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[1] Frederick Koch, "Folk-Drama Defined," Carolina Playbook, (December, 1932), p. 97.

actually lived the life about which he has written. This term will be used to describe the plays of Paul Green, because he has written about the life and character of a people with whom he has lived and known.

Social Critic. The term will be used in this study to mean someone who has an optimistic philosophy of life and a positive attitude towards the betterment of mankind because he feels that, the way for a man to move who is down is upward. He is an observer of man and society who tends to make comments on the strengths of both man and society. The social critic is a judge of or makes judgments on the present day social order. The social critic hopes that by making comments on the evils of the social order that man will attempt to correct the evils.

Very early in his playwriting career, Green began to reflect a desire to seek justice and progress for the black man by portraying many of the problems he faced. His "Negro" plays are appropriate vehicles for bringing sharply to the forefront the problems the black man faced in his society. In these plays Green takes the role of social critic by making judicious comments on the evils of his society that tend to impose varied problems on the black man. The main thrust of this study is to discover many of the evils of society under which the black man has suffered as discovered in Green's selected "Negro" plays.

Scope of the Study

This study attempts to discover the extent and significance of

Paul Green's social consciousness, and to evaluate him as a folk dramatist. This will consist of discussing each of the plays in chronological order to determine the phases of social criticism each presents. The results of the analysis will be carefully stated. Critical studies are relevant to this study only as evidence of contemporary opinion. They, however, will be investigated thoroughly in order to determine the opinions of some of Green's peers regarding his social criticism.

This study is divided into four chapters: (1) Introduction (2) Green as folk dramatist, (3) Paul Green as social critic, and (4) Conclusion.

The first chapter of this study will consist of the introduction, and a brief quasi-cultural background of the author. Problems to be solved in this study will also be mentioned here.

Chapter two is concerned with a discussion of Green as a folk-dramatist. The plays will be evaluated as to whether they fall within the framework of the definition of folk drama based on the idea of Professor Koch and the idea of Green. Professor Frederick Koch was a former professor of Green's. Included in this chapter will be a study of the structure of several of his plays with the intention of deciding whether those works fit in with a true description of the "folk". Other discussions in this study will be concerned with (1) Green's "Negro" characters; (2) Green's concept of dialect, and its use; and (3) Green's themes in partial discussion.

The third chapter of this study will be a discussion of the plays and the themes. This chapter will concern itself with

Green's role as a social critic. Some of the same plays will be used in this chapter as in the previous one since many of his "Negro" plays contain elements of both social-problem drama and the folk drama.

No attempt will be made to discuss all of the author's "Negro" plays. By referring to selected works it will be possible to evaluate Green as a social critic, and as a folk-dramatist.

The fourth chapter will contain the conclusion.

This study has dealt only with Green's "Negro" plays. They are: In Abraham's Bosom; Roll, Sweet Chariot; Hymn to the Rising Sun; Native Son; Potter's Field; White Dresses; The End of the Row; Supper for the Dead; The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock; Hot Iron; In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin; The Prayer Meeting; and The No 'Count Boy.

Thesis Methodology

The candidate was granted permission to use Green's private collection of materials housed in the Carolina Collection in the library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The emphasis was placed on primary materials such as plays, letters, interviews, recordings, autobiographies and diaries. Secondary materials included programs, clippings found in the "Clippings Files" in the Carolina Collection, biographies, summaries, and what others have written about Green and his work. The manuscripts of the plays were of utmost worth because it is in the manuscripts that Green best reveals his social consciousness. Other dissertations were examined

when pertinent.

Limitations

No attempt has been made to discuss all of the author's "Negro" plays[2] or those essays dealing with the plight of the black man because the thematic content of selected plays will reveal the extent of Green's concern for the plight of the black man.

The plays are examined and analyzed only for their structure, character, themes and not on the basis of their worth as stage vehicles or as examples of their literary merits.

Developing and Maturing Thoughts

Early Years.[3] Paul Green was born March 17, 1894, in Lillington, North Carolina. He is the third of three children. He was born on a farm, and was brought up to share in the work of the farm. He knew all about farm chores such as driving home the cows, splitting wood, supplying the kitchen woodbox, setting out young plants, hoeing cotton, spreading fertilizer, feeding chickens and pigs. He also enjoyed the freedom of the woods, fields, and river. He and his playmates would go wading and swimming in nearby streams, and fishing for yellow-bellies and catfish in the creeks. He enjoyed

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[2]See Appendix.

[3]Interview with Paul Green, Chapel Hill, March 29, 1972.

all the pleasures of a young boy living on the farm.

Green always had the desire to build. He shared this desire with his brother, Hugh, and a black playmate named Thornton. They built dams out of bricks and old lumber across small streams to spread the water into pools for wading and fishing. Their building operations included a store for themselves. It bore a sign across the front in crude letters, "Green and Thornton." The commodities of the store included such items as tobacco, chewing gum, coffee, and baking soda which, the proprietors either ate or gave away.

Green's interest in black people began at an early age because most of Green's playmates were black boys whose parents were tenants on the farm. He hunted 'possums and squirrels with black boys, went fishing with them, and along with them learned to love the woods and water. Race prejudice undoubtedly pervaded the neighborhood climate, but it never had conscious expression in the Greens' home.

Green's mother loved reading and music, and always made them a part of their home. Thus, it could be assumed that Green acquired his great love for reading, which he learned to do at an early age, from his mother. Her love of music also played a great part in developing Green's enthusiasm for, and interest in it. As a boy, he remembered such hymns and songs as "How Sweet the Song," "Helen of Kirkonnel," and "Lament of Flora Macdonald."

Green's schooling and farm life were interrupted in the tenth year by a long illness, diagnosed as osteomyelitis. The local doctor could give him no cure, and the young boy was sent to Johns Hopkins Hospital where he stayed for almost a year. He underwent an operation

that removed part of the bone of the upper right arm and replaced it with a silver plate. This illness had a marked effect upon his life. It is certain that the sensitive imagination and vivid memory which have found expression in his poetry and plays helped him in the seclusion of illness.

Green entered Buie's Creek Academy after having gone as far as possible in the local school. At Buie's Creek, he was fortunate enough to find the gifted teacher and founder, James Archibald Campbell. At the Academy he participated in the debating society and public speaking. At one of the commencement exercises, Green delivered the oration for his society. It was the practice that two representatives from the society respectively deliver the declamation and the oration. The declamation was a discourse written by some great person in history such as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, or Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death" speech. The speaker of the oration had to write his own address. The fact that Green chose to deliver the oration was another example of his ambition and his urge to put his thoughts on paper. Gold medals were given to the winners. Green was not a winner, but he got the opportunity to write and to deliver his own thoughts.

He decided while at the Academy to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Green entered the University in September of 1916. The long high ridges of Chapel Hill gave the impression of mountains to Green who had been accustomed to the flat lands of Harnett County.

Green was two years older than the average college freshman

when he entered the University. He still maintained his enthusiasm for reading after becoming a young man.

For the first time Green got a glimpse of life in a southern town. He found delight in walking through the woods that stretched southward. It was not all enchantment that Green found in his walks around Chapel Hill. As he walked westward he found the shanty town of the blacks. These unpainted cabins, tar-papered shacks, and outhouses were the first view of a black slum for Green. They made deep impressions on him that are expressed in the plays of this study. In this community were the "Tin Pan Alleys," the cafes where fights began on Saturday nights, the small frame churches of boisterous worship and equally boisterous grief, the crowded boarding houses of Potter's Field, the barber shops that served as clubs, the gathering places for song and guitar playing and banjo picking.

Green did more than explore the town of Chapel Hill and neighboring Carrboro; he studied hard. In February of his first year at the University, a list of twenty freshmen with the highest grades was published. Green's name was among the twenty but not that of his classmate, Thomas Wolfe. Also that first year Green found time to write poetry. His poems appeared frequently that year in The Carolina Magazine. One entitled "Evening on the Farm," describes a sunset in more or less conventional phrases, but shows accurate observation of such details as the notes of a harmonica from a Negro cabin, the cries of katydids and whippoorwills in the evening. Such love of rural detail fills the works of his mature writing.

Poetry was not the extent of Green's creative efforts that

first year at the University. He won a prize for a play, Surrender to the Enemy, that he entered in a local contest. The plot centered around "a southern gal's heart surrender to a Yankee captain, in opposition to her father's wishes." The story of the play is based on a local true story that happened in Chapel Hill after the Civil War. The daughter, Ellie, of the President of the University, married an officer of the United States Army, Brigadier-General Smith B. Atkins. This match between the two lovers upset the community, and, indirectly, it may have caused the closing of the University.

The production of his prize-winning play was the last thing of any significance to happen to Green that year at school. However, the next major event in his life occurred a few months later when he entered the Armed Services of World War I. He served in the 105th Engineers, of the 30th Division. Since Green was a person who had a strong belief in human freedom, the war slogans such as "war to end war," and the "battle for democracy" appealed to him. He later achieved the rank of second lieutenant with the Chief of Engineers in Paris. It is reasonable to believe that the experience he gained in map-making and land surveying enhanced his ability in planning and designing the amphitheatres for his many outdoor dramas.

Green spent two years with the Armed Services and four months of that time were spent in actual combat. He has written very little about his war experience. His loathing of war was later expressed in the long musical play, Johnny Johnson (1936).

Green's service in the Army interrupted his studies, but to him, it did not change the dreams he had set for himself. It merely

widened his concern for human suffering that he could relate his section of North Carolina to the entire world.

The war in Europe soon ended and Green returned to the University immediately. Two years of experience in the Army and two years of teaching made him older by far than the average college student. As before, he did not share in that adolescent loafing on the University campus as did his schoolmate, Thomas Wolfe. He spent part of his time listening to young Frank Porter Graham, who, too, had just returned after serving with the Marine Corps. Graham was then history professor and Dean of Students. Archibald Henderson, mathematician, writer and historian, one of the initial sponsors of The Carolina Playmakers, was then at the University. Edwin Greenlaw was at the University as Dean of the Graduate School and Chairman of the English Department. Green studied English with Greenlaw, Norman Foerster and James Holly Hanford, all great men in their areas who helped to generate Green's interest in wanting to learn. There were two other professors at the University who shared in shaping the course of Green's life; they were Horace Williams, philosophy professor, and Frederick Koch, the folk-dramatist. The teaching and the philosophy of Horace Williams made profound impression on Green and were reflected in his later works. Williams' philosophy was strongly rooted in Hegelianism, but even more strongly in the whole soul and individuality of the man. He taught his students to question and to be curious. He compelled his students to concentrate on the essence of the thing. Green found in Williams a person--a teacher--whose ideals were congenial with his own. He was encouraged by Williams to choose

philosophy as his major subject, and he spent one more additional year of graduate study at Cornell University.

Williams guided Green into philosophy, but Frederick Koch led him toward the theatre and playwriting. Koch was already known as an apostle of folk-drama. He taught Green to write; and insisted that he write of what he knew first-hand, the familiar and the well-remembered. He encouraged Green to write about the natural, historical, and the legendary folklore of the region which he had known all his life.

Green's interest in playwriting had already been sparked by his winning a prize for his first piece. But the fact that this able dramatist was at the University when Green returned marked a significant point in Green's development as a writer.

His stay at Cornell did not cause him to lose sight of the kind of writing he wanted to do. While at Cornell he was able to continue his writing. Two poems appeared during this period under the title of "Carolina Sketches." These "sketches" were a description of a black convict which developed later into a scene in Potter's Field, and into a chapter of This Body the Earth. They revealed the beginning of that horror of capital punishment that has made him oppose it publicly ever since.

After a year of graduate study at Cornell Green accepted a teaching position in the philosophy department at Carolina. Back in familiar surroundings in Chapel Hill, he continued to write. His efforts in playwriting increased as a result of his connection with the Playmakers. Many of the plays used in this study were products

of Green's early years. Plays of this period were White Dresses (1920); Sam Tucker (1921); The End of the Row (1923); Your Fiery Furnace (1923); The Hot Iron (1921); The Prayer Meeting (1923); The No 'Count Boy (1923); In Abraham's Bosom (1926); In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924); The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923); and Supper for the Dead (1924). Already in the early years of writing Green displayed his ability to stir up controversy by his boldness in attacking social wrongs, and his deep concern for the humiliated and dispossessed. The play, White Dresses (1920), caused considerable controversy in Chapel Hill when it was known that the Playmakers had planned to produce it in their nineteen twenty one schedule. Decision went against the play and it was removed from the Playmakers' schedule. Chapel Hill was not ready for such a subject to be discussed publicly. The story tells of a black girl's love for a white boy and the girl's utter rejection by the boy's father who refuses to let the affair continue. The year nineteen twenty one was certainly not the time and North Carolina not the place for discussion of such a delicate subject. These plays are discussed later in this study.

In Green's plays and stories of this time, his characters were either blacks or white farmers and sharecroppers of the Cape Fear region of North Carolina. In these early short plays can be found the genesis of themes which were developed more fully in later longer works. The themes that are found in the later works are the bitter fate of the black man, the black man's ambition to rise, his frustrations, the white man's blind cruelty and injustice, love

between black and white, the angry resentment bred by the pressures of small neighborhoods, the defeated aspirations of the tenant farmer, the tragedies caused by intense yet ignorant religious feeling, and the decay of old families in the Old South.

Many of Green's early plays are of Negro life. Critics of the time expressed their opinion of the man and his works. R. D. Skinner wrote:

> The earlier short plays . . . concern the Negro's relations to the dominant white population and are plays . . . of a man of extraordinarily sensitive feeling. . . . He has tried to make us see . . . the inner tragedy of the black race. . . .[4]

Skinner went on to say that the plays of Green's had theatrical vigor, and that was not their only value. They had great educational value because of the playwright's concern and vivid observation and revelation of many aspects of our society. An example was the revelation of the not so widely known life of the black race. Green's plays were useful in providing opportunity for black actors to display their talents. He felt that Green's plays were of great importance, if they were accomplishing the social results Green's admirers thought they were; they merit serious attention for their value in social development and concord.[5]

V. F. Calverton stated his impression of Green's works in the following:

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[4] R. D. Skinner, Our Changing Theatre, p. 58.

[5] Loc. cit.

> It is the old Negro whose life is still incorrupted by the influence of the petty bourgeoisie, on the straggling but defeated Negro, who in In Abraham's Bosom meets frustration at every turn, that arouses the interest and sympathy of this new school of authors. In this sense, however successful they have managed to avoid the sentimentalities of the plantation school, these writers are much closer to the plantation tradition than they suspect.[6]

Various critics have expressed their opinion as to whether Paul Green wrote propaganda plays or not. Here John Anderson wrote his opinion:

> Paul Green . . . has the militant passion of the reformer but they spring more directly out of the emotional impact and out of a simple, and less confused feeling for dramatic statement. His anger holds the primitive power of his humor and both of them reveal the directness of an approach unclouded by self-conscious theory.[7]

It should be pointed out here that literary figures of the day were mainly concerned with Green's success as a writer for the stage and not his comments on the ills of society. At the same time, however, there were a few critics who felt it necessary to write about the various themes revealed in his works. The researcher tried to select those comments that were mainly concerned with his social criticism, and not for any literary or dramatic quality.

Archibald Henderson wrote that Green was profoundly sympathetic with the Negroes and knew them in all their peculiar

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[6]V. F. Calverton, The Liberation of American Literature, p. 147.

[7]Rene Fulpo-Miller, The American Theatre, "Paul Green," p. 75.

conditions, and was "keenly aware of the many problems--educational, industrial, agricultural, social, sexual--which constantly confront them.[8] Henderson continued with, "Paul is the only Southerner I have ever known who is Gallic in ethnic universality and lack of racial antipathy." Henderson knew Paul Green as a student in his mathematics class, as a neighbor and as a colleague on the faculty at the University of North Carolina. Green and he have served together on many university, state, regional, and national committees. Although Henderson had much admiration for both the man and his works, he attempted objective appraisals. Consequently, this opinion was of considerable value. Henderson approved[9] of Green's collaboration with Richard Wright in the dramatization of Wright's popular novel, Native Son.

Many people of different walks of life--clergymen, dowagers, "nigger-haters," in North Carolina did not approve of Green's collaboration with Richard Wright and the dramatization of Wright's novel, Native Son. Therefore, Ernest Starr, on his own accord, undertook to come to Green's defense from the criticism of such people. In the Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, Starr wrote:

> Paul Green undertook the task (the dramatization of Native Son) because he was impressed by the nature of the thesis. He gave his belief to a man (Richard Wright) and his book because he is a fearless philosopher, with

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[8] Archibald Henderson, "Paul Green, Carolina Playwright, Knows Negroes," Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, (March 23, 1941), p. 22.

[9] Ibid.

> many dramatic successes to his credit, all of social importance. In Native Son, he saw a vivid treatment of the racial situation far beyond the Southern area. He regards Wright's novel as a psychologic treatment of the corrosive effect of race prejudice.[10]

Green was not alone in making comments about the South and the country. There were other playwrights who were equally critical. For the plays of the twenties were marked by a rather harsh critical realism. What novelists such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser had been saying about America in their novels began to be said more lyrically in the plays of Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, Elmer Rice, Sidney Howard, and Philip Barry--to name a few. The theatre is almost always behind the times because it is a mass medium. It takes a while for people to acknowledge publicly what a few individuals may think and say privately.

It was the artistic pleasure of the playwrights of Green's time to deride, curse, bemoan the havoc, spiritual blindness and absurdity of America's worship of its materialistic success. Another feature of the plays of this period was that plays which had previously satisfied audiences with the mere tracing of types began to strike them as being hollow. Representative characterization began to show its face on the stage. Men and women were no longer heroes or villains but humans, a mixture of contradictory traits.

World War I had not long ended and this seemed to be a

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[10]Ernest Starr, "Should Races Collaborate? Asks Starr," Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, (April 27, 1941), p. 15.

constant theme for playwrights of this era. It is not a new theme for playwrights of this era. It is not a new theme in literature for Euripides wrote about the horrors of wars in his The Trojan Women (415 B.C.). Maxwell Anderson and Laurance Stallings wrote their sentiments against war in What Price Glory? (1924); Paul Green wrote his expressions of war in Johnny Johnson (1936); Eugene O'Neill who expressed the sense of loneliness in The Moon of the Caribbees (1919) was taken up by John Steinbeck in Of Mice and Men (1937). The plight of the black man has always been presented on the stage by one playwright or another. DuBose and Dorothy Heyward presented their sentiments in Porgy (1926), and that same year Green presented his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, In Abraham's Bosom (1926).

What were the black playwrights doing and how did the advent of theatre affect them? The black playwrights of the period wrote for two audiences--the uptown Harlem audience and the downtown Broadway audience. For the downtown audience they had little choice but to imitate the images already provided by white dramatists and, if possible, to modify those images into more flattering portraits. Willis Richardson"s play, The Chip Woman's Fortune (1923), was the first to appear on Broadway. Richardson emphasized the physical strength, the nobility, and courage of his heroes. In The Flight of the Natives (1927) Mose refuses to permit any man to flog him, as Abraham of Green's In Abraham's Bosom (1926), but when his master threatens to sell him "down the river," Mose decides to escape without his wife, who is physically unable to withstand the rigors of

flight. As he leaves, however, he promises to rescue her eventually. The heroes of The Black Horseman (1929) are tall, athletic Africans eulogized for their bravery. In both works, Richardson glorified qualities which he considered intrinsic virtues of the black man: dignity, nobility, and courage.

Although Eugene O'Neill earned praises for his dramas about the black man, he seemed to stress a fixed opinion that blacks will fail if they attempt to live according to white men's standards. In The Emperor Jones (1920), Brutus Jones rules despotically as the emperor of a Caribbean island; but, cowed by his own fears, he becomes helpless and is killed by the rebellious natives. Thus, the loot is left, one must surmise, to a white trader, Smithers, who is untouched by the insurrection. In O'Neill's All God's Chillun Got Wings (1924), the first attempt of a white dramatist to picture a middle-class black sympathetically, the protagonist seems frustrated in a white man's world. Incapable of passing the bar examination, he dwindles into a sexless, paternal protector of his white wife, whose hatred of him and of herself has driven her insane. Ironically, the role of the black whose aspirations surpass his mental ability was played by Paul Robeson, a black Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Rutgers University.

Paul Green has envisaged failure for the black man. In the Pulitzer Prize-winner In Abraham's Bosom (1926), Green dramatized Abe's failure to educate his people. Although he emphasized the fact that Abe's intense desire to educate his people did not compensate for his own lack of education, Green offered the hope that

Abe's young pupils would succeed where Abe failed.

Green in more plays than any other white dramatist has written about blacks and sympathetically delineated the black poor of North Carolina in credible situations. In In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924) two murderers kill each other while fighting over plunder; The End of the Row (1923) is based on the theme of miscegenation. In The Hot Iron (1921) a black wife kills her husband because he mistreats their children. The Prayer Meeting (1923) focuses on the black's struggle for equilibrium in society. Supper for the Dead (1924) focuses on the religious superstition of the black man. In The No 'Count Boy (1923) Pheelie, a girl who wants adventure, finds romance briefly with an insane youth. Potter's Field (1929) and Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935) expressed Green's contempt for the penal system of North Carolina which punishes mainly the black man. The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923) focuses on the black man's superstitious beliefs.

While Green in recent years has stressed the fact his black creations were regional and temporal, no such regional and temporal limitations, however, have been emphasized in the many productions of the Heywards' Porgy, (1925). The play revealed many aspects of the life and character of the blacks of a particular class in South Carolina. The libretto of the more famous operetta Porgy and Bess, was adapted from this drama, which tells of the inhabitants of Catfish Row. The protagonist, Porgy, a crippled street vendor, befriends and falls in love with Bess, mistress of a black "badman." When Porgy kills the man in order to protect Bess, he is imprisoned.

After his release he learns that Sporting Life has seduced Bess into resuming her drug habits and accompanying him to New York. Hoping to find her, Porgy follows.

Ernest Culbertson, who also earned a reputation for dramas about blacks, concentrated on the exotic aspects of their lives. His play Rackey (1920) tells the story of the entanglements of an immoral woman; she is killed by her husband for being untrue.

The plight of the black man and the black man as dramatic subject were just one of the concerns of the playwrights of this period. The laborer as a symbol of inner disharmony within the apparent health of the American society which we observe in O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (1922) became a leading theme of the period. Clifford Odets wrote about the worry of lower middle-class poverty during the years of the depression in Awake and Sing (1935). Odets seemed to have been saying to the American people to "go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills," and in another reflection, "Life should have some dignity." It seemed that most of Odets' opinions were expressed in these bare words.

However, the interest which Paul Green has shown in the black man as dramatic material was "aroused in early childhood, in a region quite remote from . . . literary fashion."[11] Born on a farm near the small eastern North Carolina town of Lillington, Green, in describing his youth in his own words, "worked out of doors, Spring,

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[11]Agatha Boyd Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, 1951, p. 32.

Summer, and Fall, and went to school a few months each Winter."[12]

In an interview given shortly after his play, In Abraham's Bosom, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1927, Green commented on his background and its value to his work:

> My education in my life began with the . . . sun upon my back, and black men grunting at their work, shoulder to shoulder with me. . . . I started out . . . close to life--in the elemental--and now New Yorkers are talking pityingly about my 'handicaps'. The things they consider handicaps were my greatest advantages.[13]

Green declares his first memories to be those of the "Negro ballads, singing out by moonlight and the rich laughter of the resting blacks, down by the river bottom."[14] "I am of the soil," he proclaims, "of cotton fields and tumble down shanties and lush southern swamps."[15] This background is a significant aspect of Green's black drama, which always reflects a Romantic "folk" interest toward his subject blended with the sentiments of the social critic speaking for the betterment of the black race and against the injustice its people have suffered. "He likes their humour, their music, their speech, their spontaneous poetry,"[16] and these "folk" elements are mixed, many times, with a message which Green drives relentlessly

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[12]Barrett H. Clark, Paul Green, New York, 1938, p. 6.

[13]Virginia Swain, "The Backwoods Boy Who Spurned New York," McClure's Magazine (August, 1927), p. 60.

[14]Clark, Paul Green, p. 17.

[15]Swain, "The Backwoods Boy . . . ," p. 60.

[16]Adams, Paul Green, p. 32.

home.

Throughout Paul Green's writing career, various critics and other observers of his work have commented on the author's obvious tendency to project his own personal philosophy into the lines of his characters. Barrett H. Clark, as early as 1928, reluctantly admitted:

> . . . in spite of a new power in conjuring beauty from the woods and fields, and from a wealth of folklore . . . I am conscious of a weakness in some of Mr. Green's later works. (He) will have to guard against two things: his own personal philosophy of life, and the projection of it subjectively, into his work.[17]

By means of this "projection," Green has written his sociological treatise drama, or "message" dramas and established himself as a critic of the present day social order.[18] A philosophy of optimism rooted in Hegelian thought[19] is the basis for Green's denouncement of society and his attempts to improve the world, or, at least the lot of the black race:

> He holds fast to his belief in the ultimate triumph of a program of broad social aims . . . that the world of man is constantly changing into a better way of human relationships and that it is the individual's responsibility to make his own way, and to offer to others whatever aid he can on his way up and thus have a part in the

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[17] Ibid., p. 23.

[18] Boyd Martin, Modern American Drama and Stage, London, 1943, p. 75.

[19] Adams, pp. 17-18.

onward march of humanity.[20]

Green stated the basis for his ideas in a brief sentence from one of his essays: "I have a sort of abominable philosophy . . . that testifies . . . to me that the course of man is upward and not downward."[21] His strong belief in the goodness of man and his desire to expand this belief inevitably found an outlet and voice through the drama. Very early in his playwriting career his work began to reflect a desire to seek justice and progress for the black race. Mrs. Adams' comment is an excellent summary of Green's primary material: "His South is one of potential abundance, of wasted and eroded land, of cruel injustice . . . of laughter and music and tragedy, of courage, futility, and aspiration."[22]

In reality, Green had begun his social criticism during the decade of the nineteen-twenties with some of his earliest work, and his role as a social critic has continued up to the present. He has criticized injustice, prejudice, governmental hypocrisy, and evils in our American government and law; but he has all the while shown a strong faith in the structure of democracy and its ideals. His criticism and comments have centered mainly on what the American heritage of democracy offers to every man regardless of race, color, or creed in words and what it offers in reality. His criticism is

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[20]Henry Grady Owens, "The Social Thought and Criticism of Paul Green," (New York University, 1945) pp. 333-335.

[21]Paul Green, The Hawthorn Tree, 1943, pp. 71-72.

[22]Adams, Paul Green, p. 114.

not concerned with any basic wrongs in democracy itself, but with the men who warp its truths.

There could never be any doubt about the genuineness of Paul Green's sympathies. From a story in a recent publication, Home To My Valley (1970), one is reminded of the moving sentences with which he concluded his account of a childhood experience of seeing a black teacher struck in the face with a walking stick for asking an innocent question of the train engineer. "The school teacher of that spring morning long ago still lives--a very old man. A bad scar still shows on his face, running from his forehead down across his chin. And there must be a scar in his heart, too. There is in mine, and always will be."[23]

Green's swift and instinctive concern for the underdog, no matter whom or what he is under, has not by any means been an idealism expressed only in poetic phrases. He has frequently gone to great trouble and expenditure of both time and money to defend someone who seemed to be getting an unfair deal. In such cases he has shown a complete disregard of expediency, of local opinion, of possible unpopularity of his stand. One of the most conspicuous instances of this reckless willingness to help others occurred in 1934 in the case of the "Burlington dynamiters." During a strike in one of the Burlington, North Carolina, mills, a stick of dynamite exploded in a seldom-used corner of the mill. The damage done amounted to less than a hundred dollars. Six mill hands were arrested

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[23]Green, Home to My Valley (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 57.

--charged with attempting to dynamite the mill, and given sentences of from two to ten years each. Some of their friends, who felt that justice had not been done, went to Chapel Hill and appealed to Paul Green and William T. Couch of the University Press for help in getting the case reconsidered. After checking the facts, Couch and Green became convinced that the defendents had not been proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus convinced, Couch defended the alleged dynamiters in cogent articles for the newspapers in which he pointed out the State's previous ugly record in cases growing out of industrial disputes. Paul Green got in his car and drove around the State to find lawyers who would have the courage to take on the case in defense of the mill hands. He finally appealed to the governor. The case was re-opened, and the sentences commuted.

Another crusade to which Paul Green has given himself wholeheartedly is that to abolish capital punishment. In Roll, Sweet Chariot and Hymn to the Rising Sun, he has vividly pictured the darker sides of the State's prison system. In letters to newspapers and in public addresses he has again and again denounced the evil futility of killing a man because he has done wrong. Change him, help him, change the society, the system which has produced him, but do not take away his life, pleads Green the humanitarian. In 1947 when he was asked to speak in the University Library about his projected Williamsburg play, The Common Glory, he launched instead into a violent denunciation of capital punishment, including the description of an actual execution, which startled and shocked an audience assembled for nothing more

disturbing than a literary tea.[24]

In expressing his concern for man and country, Green has collaborated with some of the ablest musicians in the field. For the play that could be called Green's first symphonic drama, Tread the Green Grass (1932), Lamar Stringfield wrote the score. Green first met Stringfield in France where Springfield played the flute with the band of the 105th Engineers. By the time Stringfield came to Chapel Hill, he had already distinguished himself by having won the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his suite "From the Southern Mountains." He decided to make his home in Chapel Hill because of the interest in folklore already manifest there through Paul Green, The Carolina Playmakers, Howard Odum, and Guy Johnson.

In Tread the Green Grass (1932) the music is not "incidental," but conceived of by Green as a closely woven part of the play itself, taking up and carrying on the meaning beyond the limits where words must always stop. A look at Green's plays would reveal that almost all of them contain lyrics, old songs, snatches of spirituals, hymns, dance tunes, and music heard off-stage. Music has been to Green one more basic tool of expression. Tread the Green Grass was first produced in July of 1932, at the University of Iowa.

Lamar Stringfield and Adeline McCall wrote the score for the opening of the famous outdoor drama of Green's The Lost Colony (1937).

Green's other musical effort was Roll, Sweet Chariot (1934). It is a revision of the drama Potter's Field (1931). For this play

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

Dolphe Martin, a professor of music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wrote the score. The play was produced in New York in 1934, at the Cort Theatre. The production was headed by an excellent cast of black actors: Frank Wilson, Rose McLendon, and Warren Coleman. It lasted only seven performances. The New York critics did not like it; some were bored by it, finding the many characters and intricate counterpoint of dialogue tedious and confusing; others hailed it as legitimate experimentation in a new dramatic form.

Green's next collaboration was Johnny Johnson (1936). Kurt Weill, the noted musician, composed a biting counterpoint of music for the play, contributing greatly to the atmosphere. Green first met Weill in Germany while there traveling and studying. Weill later came to Chapel Hill to work with Green. Johnny Johnson was first produced by the Group Theatre in New York in November 1936, just two years after Roll, Sweet Chariot.

Green also worked with Charles Vardell, the music professor at Salem College, on a cantata to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Moravian community of Salem. The original plan called for a religious drama to be presented as part of the traditional Moravian Easter ceremony. Green's contribution to it took shape as a long unrhymed poem which Vardell set to music for chorus and orchestra. The final project was called Song in the Wilderness (1937). It was first presented as one part of the Fifth Piedmont Music Festival in Winston-Salem in June 1947.

Relatively few studies have been made of Green's works for

their social significance. Barrett H. Clark has written a thirty-six-page pamphlet, Paul Green, which treats Green as a personality, the literary and dramatic qualities of his works, and his promise as a dramatic artist. However, Clark does touch upon some phases of Green's social thought and criticism. Agatha Boyd Adams has written a short, but thorough, biography of Green. It treats of his early life, things and personalities which have influenced his outlook on life, and many of his important themes. Several dissertations have been written on Green and his outdoor dramas, but only one dealing with his social consciousness. That one was written by Henry Grady Owens, in 1945, at New York University. This study will be the first known to deal primarily with Green's black plays. Since little has been done on the "folk" plays, it is the reason, then, that this study sets out to explore this relatively untouched area of Green's writings.

CHAPTER II

PAUL GREEN'S CONCEPT OF FOLK DRAMA

This chapter will discuss the "folk" elements of selected plays of Paul Green to determine whether the plays are folk-dramas. The "folk" elements are structure, character, language, and religion. Green's definition of folk-drama will be stated in this chapter. It is important to state Green's definition of folk-drama in this chapter because it will clarify the plays and set this study apart from other theses on Green.

Definition of Folk-Drama

Folk-drama is an intimate portrayal of the life and character of a particular group of people. The term folk-drama is concerned with folk subject matter; with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. Folk-dramas, for the most part, are realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic. Folk-drama is an intimate portrayal written by one of the actual folk people who lived and continues to live with the people about whom he has written.

Paul Green's definition of folk-drama was definitely formulated by 1932. It was in that year that he wrote that folk-drama was a term designating a type of drama which deals with less

sophisticated people, usually with rural or primitive folk. The protagonists and characters of such dramas are generally depicted as being close to the conditions and processes of nature and lacking in the more cultured refinements of a higher society.[1]

Green was not the only writer of folk-drama. There were other writers of folk-drama who were encouraged to write about the legends, and rich stories of their regions. Bernice Kelly Harris and Elizabeth A. Lay were among those writers. Green, along with Harris and Lay, wrote about North Carolina life, the simple stories of the locality, of common experience and of common interest. There is something of the tang of the Carolina soil in these plays. Miss Harris in her play, Pair of Quilts, wrote of a legend that was quite prevalent in eastern North Carolina. Lay wrote of Carolina folk superstition in When Witches Ride. These subjects are similar to those in Green's plays. They too wrote about people who were close to the condition and processes of the earth and who were not interested in metaphysics. But, the thing that sets Green apart from the other writers is that he is one of the folk. Harris and Lay were members of families who enjoyed considerable wealth and position. Green did not.

The folk are the people whose manners, ethics, religious and philosophical ideals are more nearly derived from and controlled

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[1] "Folk-Drama Defined," Carolina Playbook, (December, 1932), p. 97.

by the ways of the outside physical world than by the ways and institutions of men in a specialized society. The natural world is the fountain of wisdom, the home of God. He stated further that the folk were those who live with their feet in the earth and their heads bare to the storms; those who labor with wresting from cryptic nature her goods and stores of sustenance. They develop a wisdom of living which seems more real and beautiful than those who develop their values and ambitions from rubbing shoulders in a crowded city.

If the playwrights who tell of captains and lords, kings and queens, dolls and mannikins, can cut through the flimsy veil that conceals human instincts and hopes and fears and go to the first principles of human identity, then no longer is man sophisticated or folk, but man alone with his God and his destiny. When this happens then the matter is all one and listeners are all one. Green was not saying for himself that folk-drama is more significant than sophisticated drama, that it is a question of neither folk nor sophisticate, but of man in his environment. It is a matter for the poet, the creator, the seer.[2]

Plays Defined as Folk-drama

Using Green's definition we may deduce that folk-drama in its purest form would be written by one of the "folk." For over

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[2]Green, The Hawthorn Tree, (Chapel Hill, 1943), pp. 31-34.

twenty years, Green had lived among the "folk" about whom he wrote. Indeed he was one of them. As a result, though he does not live among them now and has not for many years, his writing is the essence of folk life because he writes about the people whom he knows from an intimate point of view--from a knowledge of having been one of them himself. He knows their habits, customs, beliefs, language, and their problems. This is the characteristic of a folk writer. The folk writer will observe life, or attempt to come as close as possible to this ideal, through the eyes of the folk, as they see life. If a "folk" writer assumes a detached attitude and comments at will on his characters, or comments in any manner except as one of the "folk," or points out corruption or evil except as one of his characters would, then he misses the essence of folk-drama.

The plays of Green can be judged, then, for folk content on his own terms. A standard for judging the plays to determine the folk content can be established by combining a part of Professor Koch's description with that of Green's: an "intimate portrayal"[3] ("intimate" implying a close knowledge and thereby written from an internal point of view, as the "people" themselves would view and interpret the subject matter of which their play is a part) of "usually rural or primitive (people)" who are "close to the conditions and processes of nature" and lacking in the more "cultured refinements of a higher society."[4] Other things to be added to this

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[3]Koch, Carolina Folk Plays, First Series, p. xiii.

[4]Green, "Folk Drama Defined," p. 97.

framework would be the idea of depicting the superstitions, customs, and environmental differences of this way of life. This writer will examine play structure, characterization, and themes to determine to what degree Green's plays fit into this standard.

The plays to be discussed in the examination of the folk-element of structure are In Abraham's Bosom, and Roll, Sweet Chariot (1934). The examination of play structure will begin with Green's first full-length play of Negro life, In Abraham's Bosom. The play was first produced in New York in 1926, and won the Pulitzer Prize for the 1926-27 theatre season. This prize winning play tells the story of Abraham McCranie, the bastard son of Colonel McCranie born of a black woman working in his household. Abe is now a young man and is presently working for his white father. He studies his books the few hours he steals from his work in the turpentine woods. He studies merely for two reasons: to educate himself, and to educate his people. Even more, he aims to gain the freedom to be his own man and to be recognized by the Colonel as his lawful son. After Abe suffers many setbacks, his father, the Colonel, visits him and his wife, Goldie, and gives them a farm, the Howington Place. The farm is a christening gift for Abe's son, Douglas. By this gesture, the Colonel recognizes Abe as his son. Abe's ambition always was to open a school for the Negroes and thereby fulfill the second part of his dream. With his improved fortunes, he is able to do so. The school fails quickly, partly because of the community indifference and partly because of Abe's stubbornness and severe discipline.

Fifteen years later the family fortune reaches a new low. They have moved to another city. Abe's wife, Goldie, is an old woman before her time. She takes in laundry to help the family to survive. Douglas is now a grown man. He has turned out to be a thief. His grandmother, Muh Mack, has spoiled him. Things are not going at all well for the family. Goldie finally persuades Abe to take them back to the farm where Abe's half-brother, Lonnie McCranie, is now in charge. Abe takes his family back to the farm and Lonnie rents him a small shack. Back home with his family, Abe's desire to start a school again rises. Abe writes a long speech to deliver at the school that night. He is driven away from the school house upon his arrival by the Ku Klux Klan. Abe is beaten. As he returns home, he passes Lonnie's house. Lonnie meets him, and at this moment to lash out at anyone, he beats Lonnie to death. Abe runs home, and he has a vision of his mother and father copulating in the bushes. Within the hour, the Klans encircle his house to avenge Lonnie's death. Abe shrieks his defiance again, calls on God, and runs through the door to meet his murderers. The production of the play, and the winning of the Prize immediately brought Green to public attention. In many interviews which follow on such occasions, Green stated his opinions of the modern drama, his idea of playwriting and of subject matter. In these interviews and later (when the first wave of publicity and roar of acclaim for a young and promising new dramatist had lessened) in the critical studies, the question of structure in Green's drama appeared in many of the leading articles on him.

Concerning his opinion about the 'well made" play, Green stated his ideas of dramatic structure in the following.

> I haven't any dramatic technique, I merely tell the story, episode by episode. It seems to me absurd to try to force a story into a definite mold, demanding three well-divided scenes, with a climax for each curtain and a cut-and-dried denouement.
>
> Perhaps in the technical sense, my plays aren't plays at all. Some of the critics have said so.[5]

One of Green's best friends, and ardent supporters, Barrett Clark, stated that "Green never invents or builds a plot; life is prodigal of situations."[6]

What Clark and others said about Green's plays didn't bother him. He took pride in the fact that his plays were not 'well made," and did not follow the pattern of other plays which did nothing more than amuse the audience and assure the playwright of financial success. He expressed contempt for writers of farces and called them playfixers. His contempt was not only for playfixers but for anyone who caters to the public taste only for box-office success and disregards art in the theatre.[7] He said that "the thing for me is the story."[8] It was his desire to set down life as he saw it.[9] This

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[5]Swain, 'The Backwoods Boy," p. 121.

[6]Clark, "Paul Green," p. 13.

[7]Nell Battle Lewis, "Paul Green," The Raleigh News and Observer (March 20, 1927).

[8]Swain, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

[9]Ibid.

method of playwriting resulted in what Green and critics called episodic structure. Most of Green's plays follow this pattern. In using this pattern, perhaps Green felt that he would approach a true picture of the folk and attain the universal truth sought in recording the commonplace, day-to-day living of his people. One critic in writing about Green's play structure remarked that Green's plays "are bits of life superimposed upon the stage with a logical continuity that any set of characters forced into their scenes and denouement must necessarily lack."[10]

Green was highly praised for his determination to avoid the mechanical play, the smooth, neatly structured play which did little else than entertain. Carl Carmer, in 1932, discussing the Carolina dramatist in Theatre Arts, said that Green had discovered "that he must not compromise with those who reduce playwriting to a set of formula by which alone, they claim, may one arrive at a well-made play."[11] All critics did not agree, for Brooks Atkinson felt that "the looseness" of In Abraham's Bosom was a "weakness."[12]

Carmer called In Abraham's Bosom "an episodic chronicle in seven scenes,"[13] and Green has subtitled it "The Biography of a Negro

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[10]Mary H. Phifer, "Southern Personalities: Paul Green--Philosopher and Playwright," Holland's Magazine (October, 1931), p. 11.

[11]Carl Carmer, "Paul Green: The Making of an American Dramatist," Theatre Arts Monthly, XVI (December, 1932), p. 1006.

[12]Brooks Atkinson, "Pulitzer Laurels," The New York Times (May 8, 1927.)

[13]Carmer, op. cit., p. 999.

in Seven Episodes." Atkinson has said that in technical contrivance In Abraham's Bosom makes no pretence toward symmetrical, firmly woven drama. "Give a nigger a book and you might as well shoot him," one shiftless character remarks in the first scene. The biography of Abraham McCranie illustrates the point without elaboration or argument. With the noblest intention towards his race, Abraham studies his books laboriously, and endeavors to awaken his neighbors and associates to the beauties of life. He has to contend with the sluggish response of his fellow-laborers, with his own intellectual limitations, and he finally becomes unwittingly an apostate in the eyes of the whites as well as the blacks. Atkinson also stated that Green writing in the form of seven episodes cannot quicken his drama with the suspense that comes of artifice in play technique, and the looseness of his story is obviously a weakness in the theatre. But the formlessness of the play automatically brings the characterization into high perspectives. Green excels in development of characters through revealing incidents, and cadenced, natural dialogue.[14]

Abraham, in each of the seven scenes in In Abraham's Bosom, strives to develop himself and his race through education. Little by little he begins to make progress, but at the end of each scene, he is the victim of uncontrollable circumstances, and rises again only to experience the same defeat, and ultimately death. In this respect, the structure heightens the sense of doom hanging over the

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[14]Atkinson, loc. cit.

main character, and the play itself. However, the structure of the drama is less important to character development as it reveals the struggle of a human being. Here, Green has made character the emphatic dramatic element, and by that a depiction of the life of the "folk" is achieved, as shown in chapter two. In this way, Green's chronicle construction has served its purpose well.

Green's early attempt at symphonic drama can be found in his black drama, Roll, Sweet Chariot. It was often called a symphonic play of the Negro people. Roll, Sweet Chariot can best be defined as an experimental work. Returning to the simple narrative form of the one-acts, the play is written to be presented without intermission. It is a panoramic drama of a black community with a great many characters who contribute to building up the total picture of a Southern slum. Roll, Sweet Chariot concerns the inhabitants of a village by the name of Potter's Field. The land was literally a field owned prior to the Civil War by a wealthy man named Potter. Although the land may have been an impressive plantation at one time, during the time of the play it is a slum. The inhabitants are now being haunted by a new road that is to run right through the center of their community. The normally tense life of the people breaks wide open when one of the inhabitants, Bantam Wilson, returns after a term on the chain gang. Bantam's wife takes a lover, Tom Sterling, while Bantam is away. Bantam quarrels violently with Sterling and is killed, and Sterling is sent to the chain gang. Taunted by a white guard as he digs in the hot sun, Sterling strikes the guard and is suddenly shot dead by another guard. The play ends in a mass

sympathy for Sterling, as all the black people of Potter's Field take up picks and shovels and dig the road that is to overcome them eventually. They sing out their hope for salvation in Jesus as the play ends.

In discussing the structure of Roll, Sweet Chariot, Green said that he found that in trying to express the inner lives and turmoils of his black community he had to call upon nearly all the arts in modern theatre. Folk song and poetry were needed. Use of microphone and echo chamber could be used to get inside the soul life of some of his disturbed and vitalized people. Light that would illuminate a volatile and advancing story point would be of great use; always there was music. "Music drama" didn't seem the right term. "Lyric drama" lacked scope. Finally, "symphonic drama" seemed right--a "sounding-together" in the true meaning of the word. It was nearer to what he wanted than anything else. Kurt Weill composed the score for this production.

Green found that by bringing together the various elements of the theatre, especially music, there came a fullness and freedom of possible story statement not otherwise to be had in dealing with large groups of people in action. In this kind of theatre time could be telescoped through a symbol. Space might be compressed or expanded. Tomorrow is already here. A voice of the inner chorus commentator out of the life of his black village could say so. In the thickened moody environment, in the climate of creditability established, the audience would agree.[15] The audience did not agree, nor

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[15]Green, Dramatic Heritage, (New York and Hollywood, 1953), pp. 17-18.

did the critics. Consequently, the play closed after a very short run in New York. The failure was due almost totally to the playwright's giving spectacle a higher position than character. The idea of presenting the life of a whole town seemed fundamentally sound, but the lives of the people needed more development. Nevertheless, the mood and atmosphere of the people living close to nature was strongly depicted. A gallery of characters interacting with each other brought out the customs and folkways of the people. By so doing, Roll, Sweet Chariot fits the framework of folk-drama.

Green's Folk Characters

Paul Green has created his finest folk characters within the dramatic form of comedy, and has achieved a significant and uncompromising depiction of folk-life. He is successful in universalizing situations and ideas, and in so doing he has made use of locale, customs, and the way of life of his people in presenting episodes free from comments.

Green stated that comedy arises from man's delight in prankishness with himself and fellowman in so far as he forgets that he is a part of an all-powerful universe. Its basic pattern is a non-harmful condition which man himself provides.[16] He goes on to say that comedy has to do with anyone involved in a dramatic struggle with himself, his neighbor, or the outside universe.

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[16]Green, The Hawthorn Tree, p. 36.

Green has achieved this dramatic struggle which "arises from man's delight in prankishness" in the play The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock. The plot evolves around an old Negro man who is superstitious, thrifty, and hard-working. His name is Uncle January, and he is opposed to the wedding plans of the niece with whom he lives. The niece and her boyfriend, having previous knowledge of Uncle January's "vision" in which he was told that the devil would some day, come for him at twelve o'clock noon, decide to capitalize on the old man's dream. Charlie, the boyfriend, dons a devil's costume and almost frightens the old man to death before he falls into a faint. Regaining consciousness, he is convinced that he died, and now takes great pride in returning to life on earth, repents of the ill-treatment he has shown towards his niece, consents to the marriage, and promises to live a christian life.

Obviously, there is no "message" in this play. Green has simply shown an amusing side of life among the blacks as he knew it. The play is not considered insulting to the black race. Of course, the extremely sensitive may think otherwise. The action of the play is not limited to a particular race of people, or determined by social strife. However, it is folk-comedy because it depicts in an "intimate" manner the uncultured, rural, and primitive characters living in an environment close to the processes and conditions of nature.

The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923) is a delightful little story of black superstition. It is not a play of black-magic and "conjurin"; it is much less ethnocentric, but more entertaining than some of the other plays of superstition. The clever ruse of a

young black girl to make her reprobate uncle behave might have been suggested by an old local tale. It certainly has that quality.

It would be a mistake to overlook The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923) in favor of some of the more striking dramatic plays of black superstition because it seems to approach what Alain Locke, the outstanding authority on black drama, has considered the genuine "folk" play. Locke recognizes the tendency of both white and black playwrights in treating black themes to emphasize social criticism or to exploit the rich material for quaint distortion. For Locke, the true folk play is "the drama of free self expression and imaginative release, and has no objective but to express beautifully and colorfully the folk life of the race."[17] The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923) approaches this ideal; The No 'Count Boy (1923) fulfills it, also.

The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923) is a delicious bit of grotesque horseplay, genuine and imaginative. Green has created a memorable and comic folk character in Uncle January.

The one-act play The No 'Count Boy (1923) is described by Green himself as "a comedy of Negro life." Adams has called it a fantasy,[18] for it tells the tales of a wandering black boy who tries to enchant a young black girl with his tunes and tales of faraway places and escape from the commonplace. The play carries a suggestion

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[17]Alain Locke, "The Negro and the American Drama," Theatre, Essays on the Art of the Theatre, ed. by Edith Isaacs (Boston, 1927), p. 299.

[18]Adams, Paul Green, pp. 31-32.

of the universal yearnings of all youths. It goes beyond the limits of a comedy on Negro life and ignorance with the usual stereotyped minstrel humor, and acquires the characteristics of folk-drama. It paints an intimate picture with the plot growing out of its characters. Since the play presents a picture of simple life expressing a universal idea through the habits, speech, and customs of these black people, it reaches the ideal of folk-drama.

The plot of The No 'Count Boy deals with Pheelie and Enos who are devoted lovers, and a no 'count boy who almost brings the love affair to an end. Enos is a staid, reliable, devoted lover, but is as exciting as a plow in the field. Enos cannot understand his sweetheart, Pheelie, who dreams of excitement and far away places such as Niagara Falls. Pheelie is tired of field work and is bored with life. Unexpectedly, late one hot Saturday afternoon, a young boy in ragged clothes appeared in her front yard as Enos and she prepare to go for a ride before church. The young boy plays a harmonica as if it were a thirty-piece orchestra. The young boy dreams of excitement and far-away places, as does Pheelie. He begs for food, and within a few minutes he has won Pheelie to his way of life. The young man has come from nowhere, and plans to earn his room and board with his song and harmonica music on the open road. He offers Pheelie all the things about which she has been dreaming for years. She agrees to go off with him that night in an old dress, and with no provisions except what they earn on the road with song and the harmonica. The plans are destroyed when an old woman enters and beats the boy in front of Pheelie and Enos and reveals him as no 'count and a

liar. The boy proves to be her son who had left home after she had given him a beating. The old woman goes off beating the boy, as Pheelie is left with her empty dreams and Enos. The wistful and pathetic quality of the fantasy comes with the girl's emotional break at the end of the play when she realizes that the boy who promised her a never-never land of happiness and play is only a no 'count boy who dreams and tells wild stories created by his own prolific imagination. The young black character, known only as the "no 'count boy," is, in many ways, the Pied Piper of Hamlin. Here he is playing his mouth harp and calling people away from the boredom of everyday life to a land of fantasy and make-believe. Only when the old woman appears at the end of the play and reveals the boy as a dreamy liar does the young girl return with a shock to the world of reality. The old woman represents truth and the play ends as the conventional minded boyfriend comforts the girl, who realizes that her little dream has come to an end. Many of the no 'count boy's tales of far away places and watermelon and ice-cream feasts are told in expressive language which is humorous and essential to the development of his character. Green has again created well-defined folk-characters as in The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock (1923).

In The No 'Count Boy (1923) there is no edge of social criticism to sharpen, no note of bitterness or protest. There is nothing, indeed, but the simple spontaneous responses of the black characters and the rich poetry of their speech and singing. More than any other of Green's one-act plays, The No 'Count Boy (1923) is a play of "folk

character." The "Boy" is never named; he comes from nowhere in particular and everywhere in general--"As fo' whah I come from, I cain't tell you, bo, 'caze I dunno hardly. . . . You see whah de sky come down to de earf--way, way yonder?" The no 'count boy has wandered from there and will wander back. He is a folk embodiment of the romantic spirit of wandering and adventure; he is also the impulse to live freely, full of joy and wonder of life. He is the dream that lives by the side of cruel necessity and dull fact and is sometimes overcome by them. But the no 'count boy has a larger vision of truth, and he persists in the face of fact, for he is a maker of music and poetry, a seer of the beauty and joy of life. Like Synge's "playboy," the no 'count boy's view of fact and conventional reality is affected by a heroic, romantic dream. The No 'Count Boy (1923) is a triumph of the poetic folk spirit.

Outside of the white world in the South is a strange island of black experience which has occasionally aroused the interest of writers and folklorists. Paul Green sometimes enters this world to bring back to us many exciting folk motifs. It is a world governed by fear and superstition, formalized by the ancient mysterious rites of black magic and voodoo, as the blacks of the South call it, "the conjure":

> Keep way f'om me hoodoo an' witch
> Lead mah paf from de po' house gate
> Ah pines fer de gold'n harps an' sich,
> O Lawd, Ah'll jes' set an' wait
> Ole Satan am a liah an' a conjurer too;

Ef you don't mind out he'll conjure you.[19]

Supper for the Dead (1923), first published in The American Caravan, makes use of voodoo as a folk motif, clearly to symbolize evil power. The central action deals with the evil character of Fess Oxendine, a Croatan Negro, living in a primitive environment deep in the swamps of eastern North Carolina. Oxendine, after having raped and murdered his own child, is finally brought to justice of a somewhat sordid and savage nature through the black magic of an old "voodoo" woman and her two horrible, snake-like daughters. The author makes full use of supernatural, ghostly effects through an apparition of the dead daughter, magic potions and brews, voodoo spells and convulsions. The characters are grotesque and inhuman. The emphasis in this play is placed on effects of horror and sensationalism with little tracing of motives or personal revelation.

Green makes a kind of primitive, grisly poetry of the conjure-ritual. The recipe for the witch's brew that entices the ghost to supper might have been handed down by the weird sisters in Macbeth. The dipodic meter is also reminiscent of Shakespeare's spells:

Feathers, cakes and beans and corn
Thumb of the bastard son just born.
Spiders, wasp and field-mice tongue
Eyes of a man the gallows hung.

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[19]Newbell N. Prickett, "Conjure Song," Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (Chapel Hill, 1926), p. 168.

Devils snuff and the dried dog brains,
'Oman's scabs that died in chains.
Ground calf-tongue and the black cat's bone--
Come up, Miny, get your own![20]

Green is most successful in exploring the possibilities of black folk superstition in In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924), which first appeared in One-Act Plays for Stage and Study in 1925. This play provides a tense opportunity for the presentation of a long train of local "ha'nts," and the dumb-show spectacle of these creatures in impressive theatre. In a letter to Emily Clark, who preceeded Green as editor of The Reviewer, Green explained his intention and method In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924):

> . . . I have tried to incorporate in a logical activity the common ha'nts that pursue Negroes in this part of the country, to give them their local dressing. Some of them are new and some are as old as the oldest ballads, but each wears North Carolina clothes, I think. The weakest part of the play are the Sheriff and his Deputy. But against the swirling of superstition and hate and fear of Boll-Weevil and Blue-Gum, they should, it seems to me, be typelike with a sort of woodeness. . . .[21]

In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin (1924) focuses on the hunt for two black murderers who hide themselves in a deserted shack that is believed to be inhabited by spirits and creatures of a supernatural

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[20]Paul Green, Supper for the Dead, p. 7

[21]Paul Green, A letter to Emily Clark, quoted in Emily Clark's Innocence Abroad (New York, 1931), p. 262.

world; it could be considered a "hunt" story. The plot evolves around Bollweevil and Blue Gum Ed, murderers in the play who hide in an old haunted cabin. While there, Blue Gum kills Bollweevil and he imagines he sees horrifying images. He sees a glow under a huge pot which cooks a rat, a snake, a dead man's hand, and other witch's items. He sees a giant dog that drinks blood; a little faceless girl in a white dress; a jack-muh-lantern, half boy, half dog. He tries to escape from his nightmare and Aunt Mahaly herself appears. She draws a circle around Blue Gum Ed for goblins to form their dance. This caused Blue Gum to drop dead. Afterwards the sheriff enters and finds Blue Gum lying dead on the floor of the cabin. Barrett Clark had this to say about the play and compared it to one by Eugene O'Neill:

> "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin" . . . is described as a Negro melodrama. Reminiscent though it is of The Emperor Jones, it is a fully conceived and highly imaginative piece. You feel, during the rapid development, as though you were being suddenly whirled back into time to the most remote period in the social development of the Negro. The one surviving murderer experiences all the spiritual torments to which his race is heir.[22]

Obviously this comment is over-enthusiastic, but it has some validity. The Emperor Jones is a fully developed character whereas the characters of In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin are less developed and of the melodrama types. The supernatural effects in The Emperor Jones, in revealing the subconscious horrors and fears of a person's mind, are

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[22]Clark, "Notes on Paul Green," Drama, (January, 1926), p. 137.

essential to the final mental break-down of the character. However, in In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin horror for horror's sake seems to take precedence over the mental and emotional break-down of the black murderer. The constant building of tension and progression toward the climatic breakdown in O'Neill's play is markedly superior to the static action of Green's melodrama. However, it is true that Green's murderer becomes increasingly more crazed as the plot develops, but his character is not strong enough to compete with the spectacular effects.

In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin, in Clark's words, was "not so much a study of panic as a grotesque fantasy on a variety of Negro themes. Here is far less conscious art in it than . . . in O'Neill's play and more of the folk element. It is an elaborate pageant of dramatized folklore."[23] This analysis, then, confirms the preceding one in that character is relegated to a position below supernatural elements. O'Neill's demons act as a symbol for the inner conflict of the protagonist. It is he who eventually drives himself insane. On the other hand, the demons in Green's play are not convincing as internal elements of the mind because character is subordinated to plot. However, the play gives a thorough depiction of folk life.

Of the two plays examined as melodrama, Supper for the Dead is the better play. Characterization is more vivid, even though two-dimensional, and the general action of Supper wastes less time on horror-for-horror's-sake than Cabin.

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[23]Clark, Paul Green, p. 17.

Both plays meet the specifications for folk-drama in their depiction of folk life, and the characters are vividly portrayed. A writer, in creating a well defined picture of people and their thoughts and emotions, must create characters who show varied reactions of good and evil in order to give a true picture of the folk as possible. This has been accomplished in both the plays discussed.

Language of Character

The use of dialect has been one of the most significant aspects of Green's folk-drama. It is poetic, and it sets Green's characters apart from those of other playwrights. He has always relied upon its use in his "Negro" plays. In many of his earlier works the reader has difficulty in translating because this element has been so heavily applied. Consequently, Green is found to have concentrated more on the effects of language than on plot and character. However, in later works, the pattern has changed. There is only enough to establish an authentic atmosphere for the situation and for characterization. Green was asked in an interview[24] about his change in the usage of dialect in his works and the reason for doing so. His reply was that in his earlier plays he wrote down the speech of these Negroes as it sounded to him, not realizing how difficult it would be for someone who was not acquainted with the way

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[24]Interview with Paul Green, March 29, 1972, in Chapel Hill.

of life and speech of these people. It was not until Edith Isaacs of Theatre Arts Monthly complained to him after she had read one of his plays with great difficulty did he realize the extremities to which he had gone. From then on, he used the amount he felt was necessary only for the establishment of character and mood in the work.

The element of dialect has great value in the plays of Green in determining them as folk drama. Howard Mumford Jones has stated that Green's sense of the cadence of actual speech, the music of uncultivated conversation, is another characteristic that links him with the people about whom he wrote. The language of Green's plays is the authentic language of people who live close to the soil and who have no interest in metaphysical discourse. Jones said that such speakers make a few words serve a complexity of meanings. Their conversation is not with words, but through them. What they say is less than what they feel and mean. The central quality of Green's work is its lyricality.[25] Green's use of language through the black characters shows the intimacy with which he knows and sympathizes with them. "Like Synge, he has made use of the commonest words and phrases, giving them new and surprising turns, and making of them a living speech."[26] stated Clark.

Green, himself, has said that he is never finished writing and changing his plays. He is always revising plot, characterization,

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[25]Paul Green," Southwest Review, XIV (Autumn, 1928), p. 7.

[26]Clark, Paul Green, p. 11.

and language in order to improve them.[27] In comparing an early edition of In Abraham's Bosom with one of fairly recent printing, there is considerable change in the dialect without any damaging effect on characterization and mood. There is a song at the opening of both editions and the deletion of dialect is very noticeable. The song of the earlier edition reads thus:

> My feet wuh wet--wid de sunrise dew,
> De mornin' star--wuh a witness too.
> 'Way, 'Way up in de Rock of Ages,
> In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.[28]

The fairly recent printing reads:

> Oh, my feet were wet--with the sunrise dew,
> The morning star--were a witness too.
> 'Way, 'Way up in the Rock of Ages,
> Up in God's bosom gwine be my pillow.[29]

The first song is more poetic and beautiful than the revised song.

Not only did Edith Isaacs complain about Green's heavy use of dialect, she also made comments about a lesser aspect of Green's plays. She was of the opinion that Green's use of lengthy and detailed stage directions hampered, rather than served, the reader's attempt to visualize the action of the play.[30] In Green's use of

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[27] Interview, March 29, 1972.

[28] Lonesome Road. New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1926 p. 3.

[29] Green, Five Plays of the South, (New York, 1967), p. 107.

[30] "Paul Green, A Case in Point," p. 492.

dialect, he, evidently, felt that dialect would have aided more in character development. Since the use of dialect is more or less a standard part of all his Negro characters, it cannot individualize a character and may be helpful only in pointing out, generally, the kind of people presented in the drama, and in creating an atmosphere.

There is little agreement between Edith Isaacs and Agatha Adams. What Isaacs called a flaw in Green's style of writing, Adams regarded as one of his major attributes. She thought it commendable of Green to show lack of dependence on the actual spoken line of the play in conveying meaning:

> The plays of . . . the first years reveal many other aspects of his talent and style which have continued in his later work. Among these are the ample and detailed stage directions, as carefully worded as the dialogue and often containing nuggets of character portrayal and descriptions which convey the tone and atmosphere desired. (Note the poetry of the final stage direction of In Abraham's Bosom: "The wind blows through the house setting the sparks flying.") In the length and detail of these stage directions, the author at times seems to be straining . . . against the conventional limitations of the theatre, attempting to conjure up in a paragraph . . . an entire and complex social climate.[31]

As Mrs. Isaacs has stated, this detailed description of scenes does appear often in his "Negro" plays. It could be contributed, in part, to his lack of control in writing, as Mrs. Adams has said of his

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[31] Adams, Paul Green, p. 31.

attempts at poetry in the final stage direction of In Abraham's Bosom mixed with prose.

Nevertheless, Green is sincere to the dialect with which he is dealing, and, importantly, he has lived with the people who use it. He has, however, recognized this flaw in his too heavy use of dialect in his early plays by re-writing them, and practi- reserve in his recent ones. When dialect is applied reasonably and intelligently, it is very effective in creating the proper atmosphere. It makes comprehension of characterization clearer in a recent edition of In Abraham's Bosom.

Stark Young commented on the element of language in In Abraham's Bosom, and thought that it was one of the play's major faults:

> The dialogue of this play, apart from some of the curtain climaxes, is flat and hastily written. . . . The speeches are sometimes surprisingly false, borrowed, conventional. One of the best signs of promise in such a play . . . would lie in the ear; for nowhere in America is there better material for dialogue than in the world of Mr. Green's; nowhere is there a more special rhythm and flavor of speech than in the South, or more warmth and naïveté of words than in Negro speech. That Mr. Green made so little of this living stuff, that his lives have so little care, and so little passion for the quivering beat of life that the words might carry, is a discouraging sign in what is obviously a marked theatre talent working with material that is wholly vibrant and freshly taken out of our American life.[32]

These words hold some validity, in spite of the fact that In Abraham's Bosom is considered Green's finest play. (It has won

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[32]"In Abraham's Bosom," Immortal Shadows (New York, 1948), p. 82.

for him the Pulitzer Prize, in 1927.) However, the faults of In Abraham's Bosom can be used somewhat as a touchstone for many of the author's plays to follow. The language may too often become florid, rhetorical, conventional, but as Young has stated, there are moments in this play, as in many of Green's plays, when "the glow of strangeness and beauty comes over [a] scene; and for a little we have the sense of a soul working and of poetic truth."[33]

Religion and the Negro

Green's works reveal hidden corners of the soul and mind of the black man when he is in frantic flight or when he is at rest. Whiskey and sex are only part of the baggage he is forced to take in flight. If whiskey and sex enable the black man to live in an illusionary state where he can hide the source of his indignation, religion provides for him the vital reason for existence. This religious experience is far more than a drug, more than a way out of sorrow. It enables him to discover a value in himself, one other than what the white man dictates: a deep spiritual sense that forms a dignity, an endurance, a conviction of future reward and immortality that are beyond the white man's understanding. This confidence rests entirely on the knowledge that "in God's bosom gwine be my pillah."[34]

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[33] Loc. cit.

[34] Green, Lonesome Road, p. 3.

Religion provides strength and endurance for Tilsey in the play Hot Iron (1921). Hot Iron is a one-act play about Tilsey McNeill, a washerwoman and a field hand, who aches with migraine headaches, with the burn from her iron; even more, with the fact that her three children, under her feet, are ill-fed and poorly dressed. Her husband, Will McNeill, who had left her and the children, returns only to go to bed with her and to take her money. She knows that he will drop the seed of another child in her womb and then go away again to his other women. Tilsey refuses to accommodate Will, so he grabs their son, thinking that the son was going for a gun to aid his mother. Tilsey has had enough. She cannot take any more. She refuses to see her son beaten by his drifter father, and, so beats her husband to death with the hot iron. Tilsey cries out "Lord-a-mercy. . . . We got to get help."

When Tilsey groans in pain over her ironing, she rallies her strength instinctively with a little song about God's mercy;

I walk in the morning, walk in the evening_____

O baby don't you cry.

Work and pray and work and pray,

With Jesus by and by,

Lemme lay my body down, lemme lay my body down_____

With trial and trouble, trial and trouble_____

O baby, husha your cry._____

For Tilsey, it is not a question of elevating her social and/or economic position but rather of keeping herself and her children alive. Surely, Jesse Faust, the black critic, was thinking

of The Hot Iron (1921) particularly when she wrote of the plays in The Lonesome Road (1926):

> These plays cannot be put on the stage; we cannot endure them; they wrench our hearts and turn our stomachs. Horrors like these are implicit with a cosmic inevitableness; they are for God to behold and cure. We poor humans are too weak for the strain.[35]

There is hardly another piece of naturalism in the American drama which is more affecting than The Hot Iron (1921). With almost no formal plot the details of horror-ridden poverty are arranged cumulatively to gain a stunning effect in the final terrifying climax. Tilsey's murder of her ne'er-do-well husband is prepared for and actually motivated by a series of painful details that lay her nerves bare and, under the provocation of her husband who has returned from his wanderings to plague her again, cause all of her pent up fury to break loose as if a dam had burst. The limited form of the one-act play permits Green to examine the day--the moment when a lifetime of despair ends in terrifying chaos. One feels the inevitability of Tilsey's disaster; one day it had to happen. One feels the violence stirring in the squalor of Tilsey's life as if it were an actual presence in the wretched cabin. It is felt in the oppressive heat, throbs in Tilsey's "rising" of the jaw, rankles in her when she burns her hand as she irons the fine clothes for the white folks. Each new detail, each movement that brings further discomfort and distress, is a little jab of pain from the seemingly endless

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[35]Jesse Faust, "Heartbreak County," New York Herald Tribune Book, June 16, 1926, 2:10.

store which is intended for Tilsey. Her final hysterical utterance --"We got to get help!" may be read as the agonized cry of humanity.

Inside Tilsey's cabin the society of the society of the white man is only felt as a kind of vaguely pernicious aura. For Tilsey's suffering is too elemental, too closely linked with the most basic processes of life, to be traced to anything as abstract as social forces. However, societal codes are brought clearly into focus in those plays by Green which have miscegenation as their theme.

In In Abraham's Bosom, Doug's song to Muh Mack and to his mother, Goldie, comes down to, "Judgement's a-coming. Judgement's a-coming," and it causes Goldie to cry out, from her own deep pain, "In dat great day, in dat great day, it'll all come right."[36] The chain gang, at the end of Potter's Field continues in a similar vein, one which blots out for them the horror of the body of their friend, lying dead on the ground. It also eases the weight of the pick and shovel in the boiling hot sun, as they sing out their hope in Jesus.

This theme of religion provides no theology of salvation, no rational argument of justice which would have Jesus punish the white sinners and open His arms to the black man. There is not even a half-quoting of scriptural passages to foretell the vengeance of a wrathful God, nor to evidence the love of Jesus for all men regardless of their color. Green presents only a kind of instinctive

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[36]Green, Five Plays of the South, p. 96.

emotional definition of hope, one raised in song and dance to a fact of the present and a vision of the future. But, because it does spring from the imagination and finds immediate and simple expression, this religious impulse often turns in superstition. The minister himself helps to project this twist: because he somehow communicates with the spirit world, he speaks with authority on all matters.

In Green's "religion" plays, he plays on the Negro susceptibility to the spirit world and to the acceptance of certain great men who commune with that world. The play, Potter's Field, deals with this idea.

The plot of Potter's Field deals with a typical Negro section of a college and manufacturing town in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. In front of Aunt Quiviene Lockley's boarding house, the boarders, Ed Uzzell, Levin Farrow, Bad Eye Smith, Seeny Gray, Milly Wilson, and Tom Sterling, on a hot Saturday afternoon sit around playing horse shoes, and gossiping, while they wait for supper. Into the group pushes a stranger, John Henry, who claims to be a preacher with power to ordain others to the ministry, to preach, to heal, and to prophesy. Immediately he ordains eight-year-old Doodle Wilson and proves his ability to read the past and to foretell the future. He looks upon the people about him calls their names, and reveals something of their past, and hints at trouble for Milly Wilson and Tom Sterling. Before supper is eaten, John Henry succeeds in creating a state of emotional tension among all of the boarders. Bantam Wilson, the husband of Milly Wilson, escapes from the chain gang,

makes his appearance and announces that he is going to do some hard loving of his sweet mamma that night, before he goes on his way the following day. He has a showdown with Tom Sterling, who is sleeping with his wife while he is on the chain gang. Tom is persuaded by the others to leave. He does so but returns later in the night and kills Bantam.

The remainder of the play pictures the brutality of the life on a chain gang. Tom and John Henry are assigned to build a public road through Potter's Field. While they are working in front of Aunt Quiviene's house, Tom falls into the dust exhausted. He is beaten by the guard. In a moment of extraordinary resurgence of strength, he rises up and with a mighty effort knocks the guard down and beats him in the face. The other guard shoots Tom through the back. John Henry keeps on working and singing. Awe, fear, and love are combined in the boarders of Quiviene Lockley's house in the play, Potter's Field, when John Henry enters the scene. Though he is dressed like a dandy and his manners are elegant in the depressed setting, he carries with him an aura of magic when he admits that he might be the legendary steel-driving man. When he prophesies that Bad Eye will get new tires, that Farrow is headed for trouble with his girl, and that Bantam Wilson is off the chain gang and on his way home, Henry moves in mysterious ways that leave the others hushed and believing.

In this mystification that Henry weaves, one of the characters hints that he might be the devil, "somebody git him o' pair o' horns and a bag of fox-fire." Supernatural elements as the devil, haunts and frightful curses to hell are always a possibility for

Green's "Negro" characters. Blue Gum Ed, a murderer in the play, Aunt Mahaly's Cabin, in flight from a posse, hides in an old haunted cabin. None of these haunts actually appears in the cabin, but Blue Gum's guilt creates images out of a cultural superstition that blends moral behavior with the wildest products of the imagination.

The impact in this play comes from humorous treatment, even though the issue involves three dead men. The curse of Aunt Mahaly, dead all these years, is lifted out of the context of folklore and would seem to evoke laughter instead of wonder from sophisticated audiences viewing these plays. Green's laughter is a familiar one. He does not reject these pseudo-religious stories, nor does he altogether believe them. He regards them as peculiar to the black man's culture, to be observed and believed or not.

Green relied very much on back-country experiences which resulted in limited appeal. An example of this is the play Supper for the Dead. Fess Oxendine, a Croatan Negro, has raped and killed his daughter and has cut out his wife's eye. Queenie, an old crone intimate with the devil, appears with her twin daughters. Their beady eyes, long, gliding necks, and flicking tongues attest to the rattlesnake bite that Queenie had suffered just before their birth. Queenie chants out a command which brings back the drowned daughter to accuse Fess of his incest and murder. The half-blind wife, moved by sorcery to a courage not normally hers, shoots Fess, as the three witches slide away into the night.

As the audience is taken into Green's confidence, as it is done in Aunt Mahaly's Cabin, the conjured-up spirits, the curses of

the sinners, and the over-all folk blend of religion, superstition, and inventive imagination are convincing. But when in Supper for the Dead, he presents Queenie and her snake daughters to be fully experienced on the stage, he demands a set of beliefs which he otherwise attributes as peculiar to the black man, or to back-country folk. As it is, the play, Supper for the Dead, says nothing beyond the portrayal of unbelievable grotesque action. It tells of the black man's creative and fearsome involvement with the underworld as he attempts to discover Jesus in his soul.

For The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock, however, it can be said that it is one of Green's best one-act plays. In this play, Green demonstrates the Negro's ability to laugh at his own peculiar mixing of the spirits, haunts, and the devil with his religion.

Green is at his best in handling material like this. He has often said that he is not a stylist and that the whole school of playwrights trained by Professor Koch cares less for the well-made play than they do for telling honestly some experience of their lives. In The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock, January, the typical tyrant in his household, is the classical old man who deservedly falls before the young, sweet, but highly capable Sally. The haunting dream he carries around with him as a religious conviction and the warring drunk he has been on combine to bring the action to a believable breaking point that is as much relief as it is comic. The pace of the play, too, prepares for this climax. It builds up slowly from the disappointing news to Sally, to the happy idea of the costume, to the whispered omen of the devil, and finally to the

face-to-face meeting with the devil. From this point on, the movement is swift and noisy until the end when January runs off to tell Luke Ligon about his experience with the devil. The dialogue complements this action, for it is simple and short.

There is no attempt in this play to lampoon the black man. Sally and Charlie know that every man is persuaded by events that are outside the natural. They also know that Uncle January is more easily attacked because of the visions resulting from alcohol. The situation fits in with the black man's superstition, but may not be attributed to his culture, because the original story, in Salvation on a String, "The First Death," involved white characters. Both versions are substantially the same. Moreover, the events and the raucous humor do have the authentic touch of the black man. This play, then earns for Green the status of folk-dramatist.

In The Prayer Meeting (1923), Negro music is expressive as an outlet for religion. Prayer Meeting is about a prayer meeting that is no more than a meeting of lovers for the purpose of having sex. The prayer meeting is being held at the home of an old religious woman by her two granddaughters. The old woman is at work up at the big house and has no knowledge of the meeting. The members meet, sing, eat, drink, and smoke. They sing, make love and are having a good time when suddenly the grandmother returns home. She breaks up the meeting and throws them out the door.

The efforts of Granny Boling in The Prayer Meeting (1923) are much less in the nature of social reform than the groping aspiration of Lalie and Abe. Granny is in no sense a potential leader

of her people, and it is certain that she would look with distrust upon any attempt to change the social order of the South. Her long association with white folks as a servant in a big house has caused her to cherish "respectability" for herself and her grandchildren. She views with withering scorn the shiftlessness and wild, irresponsible living of the black "trash" in her neighborhood. Furthermore, her deep religious conviction, which ironically enough seems the grafting of Christian symbols on a more ancient, dimly understood belief, prompts her to order her household with a rigorous sense of morality:

> Grandmuh--Shet yo' mou'f! You'll be struck daid eid de lies you's telling. And I wahned you all 'bout blasphiming de Lawd in my house. Haint I tried to be 'spectable and raise chilluns to live raight and have edication? And heah all de low-down o'de neighborhood is whut dey laks to 'sociate wid. . . . And I's gwine stop it. Joe Day and Jed, and all o'you--you knows me and you knows I got power wid de Lawd. He heahs my prayers. And I's gwine ax him . . . Oh Lawd God, I cusses Joe Day and fiah and brimstone fo' ever and ever to Bu'n in hell.[37]

The Boling family has already achieved a level of economic "respectability" which far surpasses the abject poverty of most of Green's other black characters. Their house with its hall table and gramaphone, the clothes of the granddaughters, Lavina and Ila, their sweet powders and the cakes and pickles they serve their guests

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[37]Paul Green, "The Prayer Meeting," The Lonesome Road, p. 122.

bespeak a comparatively high degree of luxury and sophistication. Even the hypocritical prayer-meeting, merely a socially acceptable guise for a wild party, indicates a kind of worldliness far beyond the imagination of the black sharecropper.

The Boling grandchildren are not corrupted by poverty but rather by a loss of religious faith. Their grandmother's piety and stern moral discipline seem to them "uppity white folks" ways. They feel that blacks ought to have fun. The horrors of hell are only dimly felt; for as Brother Joe Day says, "That day's a long way off, and le's go on with our singing."[38]

The theme of The Prayer Meeting (1923) is clearly the faltering struggle of the black man to achieve some sort of equilibrium in modern American society but one must ultimately agree with Barrett Clark when he wrote:

> . . . The Prayer Meeting is primarily a work of art, a human and not a sociological document. Mr. Green may care a good deal about the plight of the Negro, but his concern is primarily with human beings as individuals. The play is a marvelous exhibition of the vast fund of devilry in the soul of the Negro; it is a revelation of unsounded depth in the soul of the black man. With the instinct of a true dramatist, Mr. Green has taken a situation which is ready at hand. The Negro prayer meeting is a drama in itself, and I cannot understand why it had not been used before in a play. In this ready-made plot, the dramatist has simply to set in motion a group of well-realized characters. He really needs no story at all, in the usual sense of the term, and no theatrical trickery.[39]

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[38] Ibid., p. 120.

[39] Barrett Clark, "Introduction," The Lonesome Road, p. xiii.

The play has social overtones in that Green was determined to point out what ignorance has done to the black man, shown by the drama's mixture of sexual relations and religion. Green knows that the Negro, living in the white man's world, has not had an easy time of it. The white man has given him religion under the influence of which he often becomes savage again.[40]

Within the title of this "religion" play is an ironic twist revealed by the degenerate "prayer meeting" and by the action of the old and devoutly religious black woman who, on inadvertently discovering the "meeting" in her home, condemns her granddaughters for their mockery of religion and in her own "prayer" asks God to curse the members of the group. Though the theme of hopeless ignorance and its effects, and the black man's struggle for equilibrium in society relate the play to social-drama, the folk-elements of religion are primary also and equal to the critical theme.

All of the plays used in this study contain elements of the folk-drama. All of the works, examined from the areas of language, basic structure of the play, and portrayal of the environment and customs of a primitive culture, are "folk." The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock, The No 'Count Boy, Supper for the Dead, and In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin are exceptions, for character development and motivation are determined by outside social forces. In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin and Supper for the Dead are considered melodramas. They stress plot with its sensational effects, and characters evolve as two

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[40] Ibid., p. xii.

dimensional types. Consequently, Green has proved himself as a folk-dramatist by presenting the folks with whom he has lived and worked and known best. These folks are not sophisticated members of society, but those who care nothing about metaphysics, and live close to the earth as common people. The plays are pathways leading into the life of Green's folks.

CHAPTER III

PAUL GREEN AS SOCIAL CRITIC

The themes in Green's plays which reveal the extent of his social thought and criticism concerning the plight of the black man are (1) the social dichotomy between black and white; (2) improvement of social conditions; and (3) social injustice. The plays which best illustrate Green's pre-occupation with these topics are In Abraham's Bosom (1926); White Dresses (1920); The End of the Row (1923); Potter's Field (1929); Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935); and Native Son (1941).

Green first began to criticize white society in his plays during the decade of the nineteen twenties for its treatment of the black people. His role as a social critic has continued up to the present. He has criticized injustice, prejudice, governmental hypocrisy, and evils in our American government and law. Even though all the while he has shown a strong faith in the structure of democracy and in its ideals. His criticism and comments have centered mainly on the irony of what the American heritage of democracy offers to every man regardless of race, color, and creed in words, and what it offers in reality. His criticism is not concerned with any basic wrongs in democracy itself, but with the men who warp its truths.

Democracy, with its ideals of equal opportunity for every man, is to Green a form of government by which each man can completely

fulfill his dreams. Since every man's dreams have not been fulfilled, and democracy is not yet perfected, Green saw fit to point out the flaws of that society with the hope of correcting it. With this goal in mind, he wrote his first and foremost message plays. His intent is to expose the evils of society, not to solve them. He wanted people to be made aware of the evils perpetuated upon the black man by the white man, with the hope that they would then work toward solving the problems.

Social Relationships between Black and White

White Dresses, a short play written in 1920, was Green's first play of social commentary to indicate concern for the plight of the black man. In this play and in The End of the Row (1923) Green reveals the consequences of miscegenation, love and sex between black and white. These two plays involve the plight of a mulatto female. A few years later the problems of the mulatto male in his attempts to improve himself and his race are dealt with in Sam Tucker (1921) and Your Fiery Furnace (1923). Both plays were combined to form the long, Pulitzer Prize-winning play, In Abraham's Bosom (1926), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In White Dresses (1920), for the first time, Green is believed to have written with two purposes in mind. He wished to tell a dramatic story, as well as to present a clear picture of a social situation. The plot deals with Mary McLean, a black-mulatto girl, who is in love with a handsome young white man, Hugh Morgan. But Hugh's father, in an attempt to save his son from having a child by a black woman, sends him away. Then, he compels Mary to marry Jim, a black man. . . . "Marry Jim, and everything will be all right.

He'll take care of you,"[1] Morgan says. "I cain't do it, I tell you. I'd rather die. Look at him, he's black, and I hate him. I'll never marry no nigger,"[2] responds Mary. As the plot unfolds, Granny reveals to Mary that her white lover and she are children of the same father. ". . . Nineteen yeah's ago come dis Christmas day was a white man gi'n yo' mammy dis heah dress, and dat white man is clost kin to you, and he don' live fur off nuther. . . ."[3]

The theme of this play is an old one in literature, but it is the first time a dramatist has taken the theme and made it live in dramatic form.[4] The emphasis is placed on the tragic consequences of miscegenation from the angle of how it affects the black woman. Mary McLean has aspiration, engendered by love, of mating on a permanent basis with a white man. The social conventions of the day were against Mary McLean and people like her. However, it was acceptable for a white man to have sexual relations with a black woman as long as he didn't marry her. No matter how deep the feeling may be, she has to subdue it. "I know yo' feelings, chile, but you's got to smother 'em in, you's got to smother 'em in."[5] She is broken hearted and will soon die of loneliness.

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[1] Green, Lonesome Road, p. 63.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] Ibid., p. 68

[4] Ibid., p. xi.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

In the powerful little drama, The End of the Row (1923) Green has treated the story of another black woman's desire to have sexual relations with a white man, and the desire of a white man to possess a black woman. Lalie, the black-mulatto woman, desired by a white man, longs for education in order to help herself and to help her people out of the depraved life. Lalie despises "nigger" features, diction, morals, and lack of ambition. She loves Ed Roberts, the white man, and he wants her. She wants him sexually, and he wants her. Aunt Zella reveals this strong sexual urge in her conversation with Lucile, while they are waiting at the end of the row for Lalie to finish. "I reckons you mought 'member you had Nora dere befo' you'n Uncle Jeemes married,"[6] Lucile reminded Zella. Zella replied with exuberance, "I sho' did. But dey won't no so'headed nigger her daddy. Hit was a white man, and one o' the strappingest dey is walking. Naw you can't say dat much, kin ye? Haw, haw, haw."[7]

The scene of The End of the Row (1923), as in so many of Green's plays, is perfectly natural to the life of a Southern farm. The characters are engaged in their primary occupation--the struggle to wrest life from the soil. We hear the women singing as they chop cotton; we hear the rhythmic "hanh, hanh" of the hoe-hands tearing through the dirt and grass. We see them emerge from the "end of the row," breathing hard and sweating, unbuttoning their dresses to cool

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[6]Green, Lonesome Road, p. 138.

[7]Ibid., p. 139.

themselves, and taking up the lunch pails that had hung on the lower branches of a "china" tree. In their noonday conversation they quickly detach themselves from the fields and the work instruments; they are extracted from the general working rhythm of the life of the farm and assume human identities, which usually and naturally reveal their involvement in a little tragedy--a tragedy in which the crushing work of the fields is always felt to be the prime mover--a steady pulse of a fate as unwavering and absolute as that of a Greek tragedy. It is as if we, the audience, in viewing the scene of the fertile fields happen upon a tragedy quite by chance. The tragedy is, perhaps a significant human application of the meaning of the fields.

First out of the "row" is Aunt Zella, a type of black often met in Green's works. She is a hearty middle-aged woman of great strength and very proud of her reputation for hard work: "Listen at dat gal! Ships! I allus leads de hoe-hands. Dey ain't nobody in dis country kin kill crab-grass de way I kin, dats my reputation."[8] Aunt Zella possesses a kind of crooked, primitive intelligence which exhibits itself in greedy animalism. Her mulatto daughter, Nora, has learned from her mother the wisdom of using her ample physical beauty to attract the interest of white men as a means of getting all of the fine clothes she so badly wants. The third field hand, Lucile, has an equally insatiable appetite for fine clothes but, because she is homely, she must content herself with the trinkets given her by her

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[8]Paul Green, "The End of the Row," Lonesome Road, p. 137.

black sweetheart Antney. After these three are already settled over their lunch pails, Lalie appears from the end of the row. She is a very pretty mulatto whose speech and manners distinguish her at once from the other black women.

Provoked beyond endurance by the cruel taunts and threats of the hussy Nora, Lalie pathetically lashes out against the ignorance, filth, and sensuality of her people:

> . . . Look at you and Aunt Zella and Lucile--look at all the Negro girls around here. Always thinking about having a good time and no matter how they get it. You never think of anything but the present, let the future go as it will. What morals you got? None. The goats and hogs in the pasture are better. What you care about education and clean living and building up homes and having healthy children? Not a thing. Can't you see you will never get anywhere living the way we have? Your whole life is spent in filling your stomach and catering to every whim that rises in you. How can I ever do anything in all this mess, how can I! How do you expect Nora to be anything besides the dirty hussy she is and you bringing her up in the same way you have! And you, Lucile, with your greasy Antney. . . . Why'n the name of heaven don't you marry him and try to be something beside a bag of gluttony![9]

The conflict between Nora and Lalie seems to epitomize for Green the thankless struggle of the black reformer. The Southern black's view of himself is conditioned by a hostile or patronizing white society, and if he wishes to survive in that society he accepts it. He comes to know his place. He is willing to accept "black" values and "black" morality as separate and distinct from those of

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[9]Paul Green, "The End of the Row," Lonesome Road, pp. 148-149.

the whites. Moreover, while he may stand in awe of the white man's ways, he feels that they are far beyond his reach, and he distrusts and resents those of his race who aspire to raise the standards of Negro life:

> Lalie-------(Turning to Aunt Zella) You don't feel that way about me, do you?
>
> Aunt Zella--I ain't saying yes ner no. But you does act stick up lak 'bout all the time. Why you think you's better 'n us utter niggers.
>
> Lalie-------(Nervously) I don't, I don't.
>
> Nora--------You act mighty like it. Anyhow everybody in the country thinks that way about you, don't they, Lucile? And they's plenty of 'em in the neighborhood white as you are.[10]

The respective ambitions of Nora and Lalie suggest the complex rational relationships in the South. Nora dreams of improving her position in the only way she knows. She is pretty and young and she believes that a wealthy young landowner like Mr. Ed would like to enjoy her. But Lalie loves Mr. Ed for his goodness and gentleness. He has given her books; he has promised to help her get a school. He speaks kindly to her and doesn't treat her as Southern white men of his class generally treat black women. She loathes even the idea of the sort of relationship Nora is planning for herself and Mr. Ed.

Yet with pathetic irony Green suggests that Southern society has already determined the nature of any relationship that can exist between Lalie and Mr. Ed. It is the very one which is most painful

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[10] Ibid., p. 156.

to her. She can come up to the house and "cook" for him, whereby she may earn the unabashed envy of black women and the leering appraisal of white men. There is no cruel intention in Mr. Ed's proposition; he is very fond of Lalie and is very lonely. What other way is there? Distrusted and misunderstood by her own people, pitifully circumscribed by the "white" morality of the South, Lalie finally resigns herself to becoming Mr. Ed's "cook."

The End of the Row (1923) stands out from White Dresses (1920), in that in White Dresses the audience is presented with an ugly set of facts which force Mary into a dark future, whereas in The End of the Row, Green converts the external frame into a more meaningful, conscious, emotional decision. Robert's bedroom will shatter Lalie in a way she would never experience in the backbreaking fields. In Robert's bedroom she could scream against the white enemy or against fate or merely against the hard facts of existence. In Robert's arms, she will feel pressed on her the guilt of a self-imposed burden. In both of these plays, the mulatto, with light-skin beauty, does catch the eye of the white man. Sex for these women, Mary and Lalie, presents the possibility of escape from the hard life that the black man lives in the South to that of a white man's lover. Of course, Mary's escape was brought to an end when she was forced to marry Jim, or leave the property. Lalie's decision is only an escape from hardship momentarily. Robert is made to suffer through an awareness of what love and heroism call for, and he is unable to defy community codes. Robert knows that he can never take Lalie as his lawful wife; society would only let her become his "cook." This subject

was a highly explosive one in North Carolina in the 1920's. Green, however, has not made the suggestion that interracial marriages would provide a solution to personal and racial problems; instead, human beings are given a chance in a moment of crisis, to perfect themselves. Mary and Lalie are merely trying to make their way up in a white man's world, but Southern tradition does not permit it. Mary and Lalie, and many other mulattoes like them, allow their moral values to be re-directed by submitting to the white man's demands. Green has the two mulatto women reaching out beyond their station in life, thereby calling down the wrath of God, who is undoubtedly white, upon themselves.

Green deals specifically with the matter of miscegenation in In Abraham's Bosom (1926). It is stated by Bud, Lije and Puny on different occasions that a black man of mixed blood would have a difficult time in finding his place in society. He is neither black nor white, but is required by the circumstances of his birth to live on the social and economic status of the Southern black man. In In Abraham's Bosom, Green is mainly concerned with the portrayal of character. Abe is a mixture of black and white, a mulatto, who wants to raise himself and his race to a better way of living. However, he fails, largely on account of forces within him and without. The play also implies that miscegenation, under existing social conditions and taboos, is dangerous because of its adverse effects upon the personality development of the individual. Bud, Lije and Puny say that Abe was different and the difference was due to the mixture of black and white

blood. It is expressed by Bud that "white and black make bad mixtry."[11] This is followed by Lije's agreement that "Do that. . . . Black down here. . . . White mens up here. Heart say do one thing, head say another. Bad, bad."[12] The idea that miscegenation is vicious to the individual is finally agreed upon by Puny when he says, "The white blood in him coming to the top. That make him want to climb up and be something. The black gwine hold him down, though. Part of him take after the Colonel, part after his dead mommy, division and misery inside."[13]

In In Abraham's Bosom (1926), Green comments on several social conditions which he considers to be the evils of society and the problem of the black man. He attacks the system for imposing certain limitations upon the black man which force him to accept a position in society less than second class citizenship.

In the very first scene of the play, Bud, Puny and Lije accept their place in society as being at the bottom. Puny swears to this position when he says that the Negro's place is down at the bottom.[14] Bud agrees with "Right on the bottom with these hands and legs, muscle power, backbone, down with the rocks and the shovels and the digging, that's the Negro. White man on top."[15] Lije accepts

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[11] Green, Paul Green: Five Plays of the South, p. 111.

[12] Loc. cit.

[13] Green, Paul Green: Five Plays of the South, p. 111.

[14] Ibid., p. 110.

[15] Ibid., p. 111.

this with "you's talking gospel."[16] Years later, Abe himself, maintains the same idea, but not with the same fervor as the others. He says to Goldie, "I tell you, gal, the Negro is down, down. The white man up there high, setting up with God. . . . He git everything, nigger git the scraps, leavings."[17] Douglass, Abe's son, completes this line of expression. He says to Muh Mack, after he had spent two years on the chain gang and returned home, that he has learned what Abe never has, that the black man belongs at the bottom. "But I's learned what he'll never learn and it's this--that we belongs down with the pick and the sludge hammer and the team and the steam shovel, and the heavy things--at the bottom doing the dirty work for the white man, that's it.[18]

Abe wants to rise above the bottom. He wants to raise others as he goes. But the blacks resent Abe's effort in trying to do so and actively oppose him. This opposition is due partly to resentment growing out of jealousy, and partly to fear of the white man, as Green has observed. The white man intimidates, uses force if necessary, to assure his place on the top of social situations. This is implied by Green when Lije says "Twon't do to mess with white folks and they riled up."[19] Bud agrees with him, and says: "You said it, brother."[20]

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[16] Loc. cit.

[17] Ibid., p. 130.

[18] Ibid., p. 169.

[19] Ibid., p. 110.

[20] Loc. cit.

Puny says: 'Won't do. Keep to your work, that's all."[21] "Yeh, work, work for'em. Get your money and your meat, push on through, ask no questions, no sass, keep to your work."[22] The conversation ends with Lije saying "Yeh, keep the mouth shut, let white man do the talking. Safe then."[23] They all agree that the black man is safe, as long as he does not talk. He is afraid to talk because of severe punishments that sometimes mean death.

The drama is largely a vehicle of protest. It was stated earlier that Green has offered an answer to the problem of the black man, education. Green, like the character Abraham, is convinced that education will solve most of the problems facing the black people.

In the long speech Abe had written for delivery at the school the night he was killed, he says:

> . . . A few short 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 not 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

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[21] Loc. cit.

[22] Loc. cit.

[23] Loc. cit.

> ready for it yet. 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.[24]

Social Ambition

In Abraham's Bosom is a passionate argument for the Negro's right to education, or rather an exposition of the bitter fruits of denying him an education. The idea of the value of education runs throughout the play. It is by the vehicle of education that Abe expects to raise himself and his people to a better way of life. He proposes in his final speech that he hopes to teach in his school: "history, farming, carpentry, preaching, teaching, and how to do anything."[25]

A sensitive mulatto of the noblest origins, tortured by a passion for knowledge, Green's Abraham feels a deep compassion for the downtrodden members of his race and a fierce hatred for the institution and men who oppress his fellows. As a leader, he leans strongly in the direction of that poetic, theoretical, and visionary tendency in black leadership, best represented by W. E. B. DuBois and Martin Luther King, rather than the practical, economic, and sociological approach of Booker T. Washington.

That Green was familiar with these two aspects of black leadership is indicated by the introduction he wrote for Edward Adams' *Congaree Sketches* (1927), in which he discusses the black "problem" and quotes from DuBois' Atlanta "Prayer to God" speech, which suggests

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[25] *Loc. cit.*

the impassioned rhetoric of Green's own Abraham:

> Bewildered we are, and passion lost, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the armposts of Thy Throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy Crucified Christ: What meaneth this? Tell us the Plan; give us the Sign![26]

It seems apparent that in a symbolic sense Abraham represents the clash between the black and white races. Abraham is a mulatto, what the black workers in the play refer to as a "bad mictry," and the racial conflict is, thus, internalized; the scene of the struggle being in Abraham's "bosom," where the soul of the man is divided and in conflict.

The society in which Abraham was born forced him to live between two worlds and in conflict with both. His struggle against the injustice of the white man's world is most dramatically presented by the antagonism between himself and his half-brother, Lonnie, whose contempt for the black race is intensified so far as Abraham is concerned because of their close blood relationship. The hostility of Abraham's own people, the Southern black, for whose betterment he had dedicated his life, is epitomized by the friction that exists between him and his own son, Douglass. Ironically enough, Douglass, whom Abraham hoped would become a leader of his people, grows up to embody all that his father finds reprehensible in black life. Reared in the black slums of the South, he becomes an ignorant, flashy sport

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[26] W. E. B. DuBois, "Prayer to God Speech," quoted in Edward C. L. Adams, Congaree Sketches (Chapel Hill, 1927), p. vii.

who delights in going off on wild sprees which frequently result in scraps with the law. Douglass' resentment toward his father's "uppity" ways finally leads him to report to the Ku Klux Klan that Abraham is planning a meeting in order to gain support for his school. Thus Abraham's own son becomes the instrument which brings about the tragic downfall.

Even in his description of the physical appearance of Abraham, Green takes special care to indicate the racial division and duality of Abraham's nature:

> His shaggy hair, forehead and jaw are masked with will and intelligence. But his wide nostrils and a slumbrous flash in his eyes that now and then shows itself suggest a passionate and dangerous person when aroused.[27]

One should not conclude, however, from details of this kind that Green considers Abraham's tragic weakness, his violent temperament, a racial characteristic. Yet a few black critics and commentators were disturbed because they interpreted Abraham's downfall as indicating some inherent weakness in the race and, therefore, found the play "defeatist."

In Abraham's Bosom is a tragedy of character and a work of social propaganda; there was need at the time, and there is still need, for literary expression of social propaganda in the area of race relations. In a tragedy of character, however, the hero's downfall is, at least in part, due to his own weakness. It is

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[27]Paul Green, "In Abraham's Bosom," The Field God and In Abraham's Bosom, (New York, 1927), p. 51.

abundantly evident in the play that Abraham's passionate nature is driven to violence and bitterness by the abuse and humiliation he is made to feel at the hands of white society. But to stop with the mistreatment of Abraham--"the external forces"-- would seem to be a distortion by over simplifying a very complex problem. Abraham's tragedy does not develop merely as a result of conflicting social forces; it is not simply the destruction of a reformer in a hostile society. It could be the tragedy of a reformer whose passion and bitterness lead him to act impulsively and at times irrationally. Thus, Green's play would come closer to a human tragedy, but since the play is peopled with both black and white characters and not all white or all black, it would be safe to say that it is a play about the black problem.

The most vividly realistic bit of character portrayal is that of Muh Mack, Abraham's ancient aunt. This excellent characterization has much in common with some of Green's other black women. In the remnants of her physical vitality and in her nostalgic harking back to the "fun" and sensuality of her youth, she rather resembles Aunt Zella of The End of the Row (1923). In her curious blend of piety and primitive superstition she recalls Granny Boling of The Prayer Meeting (1923). Muh Mack's view of race relations and of her nephew's attempt to elevate the members of their race is pathetically direct and simple. Like most of the blacks in the play, with the exception of Abraham, she is stoically resigned to the low position of the black in society:

> Time you's learning that white is white and black is black, and God made the white to allus be better'n the black. It was so intended from the beginning.[28]

Goldie McCrannie, Abe's patient wife, is in sharp contrast to Muh Mack. Goldie belongs in Green's portrait gallery of unfortunate tenant-farm women. Like others in this group, she mourns children who have died. Like the others, she struggles against her chief enemy--poverty--which has consumed both beauty and strength and left her miserably taken up with the difficult job of keeping herself and her family alive.

Surrounding the protagonist are several minor characters who convey to the reader a rich impression of life as it was being lived in a small Southern community. Although they appear only briefly, the black turpentine hands, Bud, Lije, and Puny, are strikingly individualized; they are real human beings who at their everyday labor, provide a remarkably authentic perspective for the tragedy which develops.

Green does not confine his criticism to the falling of a passion in one man, Abraham McCranie. He in no way omits the evils of the white McCranie. He continues to believe that the white man could develop a new and just ethical system in which the black man would not be given more paternal handouts. The leaders of the white community would respond to the dictates of their consciences and the inevitable movement of the times. Equality for the black man was not an easy decision to make. In 1929 Green continued his championship

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[28]Paul Green, In Abraham's Bosom, p. 111.

for the underdog. He criticized the State's penal system. In Potter's Field, Hymn to the Rising Sun, and Native Son, Green is concerned with the question of social injustice. Potter's Field and Roll, Sweet Chariot are the same drama except for occasional changes in dialogue. These changes are mainly deletions from the Potter's Field version. For a synopsis of the play, you may refer to chapter two.

Social Justice

Potter's Field (1929) concerns itself with the brutality of life on a chain gang. Tom and John Henry find themselves assigned to build a public highway through Potter's Field. While they are working in front of Aunt Quiviene's boarding house, Tom faints from the heat of day. He is beaten by the guard. In a moment of fairy-tale strength, he rises up and with a mighty effort knocks down the guard and beats him in the face. The other guard shoots Sterling in the back. As the play ends John Henry and the other convicts are digging and singing, and they are joined in the singing by the people of the community. In Potter's Field, Green depicts the down-and-out conditions of the black man in the South. Potter's Field deals mainly with the kind of housing and environmental conditions which are the lot of the black man. In Potter's Field, Green gives an authentic representation of such conditions. Another aspect with which the play deals is that of morality. Green, also, shows his concern of the Southern white justice, or injustice, for the Southern black man. In the same play, he describes aspects of the penal system, and the chain gang.

The black residential section of most Southern towns is appropriately called Shanty Town. The houses are shanties and shacks,

and sheds. They are "open houses," open enough in the summer to let in all kinds of insects; open enough in the winter to let in all the elements of that season, and incapacious enough that the black people living in them would have to huddle together, "breathing the close and suffocating air."[29] In order that they may keep out summer's heat and winter's cold, the mummy-like frozen dwellers stuffed old clothing, worn-out quilts and rags, and pasted newspapers and pages from mailorder catalogues over the holes and cracks. One of Green's characters comments on such conditions:

> . . . Sleet and rain seep through and wet the sleepers in their beds, and then pneumonia and galloping consumption rot out their lungs. The gasp of the dying child and the groan of the laborers struggling in his bed are too frequently heard. . . .[30]

Shanty Towns are noted for their low moral standards. Potter's Field is a "shanty town" yet a sort of lip service is paid at the same time to standards a little less high than those held by white people. Pre-occupation with sex and crimes of passion are well known to such communities. Many dwellers of communities like these wish not to see crimes committed. They hold harsh condemnation of any wrong doing. Yet, often when an officer of the law comes into such communities to investigate for crimes and violations of the law, no one is helpful. Consequently, the rapist, murderer, escaped convict, and violators of more or less serious

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[29] Green, The House of Connelly and Other Plays, p. 126.

[30] Loc. cit.

laws may continue to live in Potter's Field.

On the other hand, when the alleged violator is apprehended and hauled into court, frequently a quick decision is made on his trial. He is often defended by a weak counsel which has been provided by the court. The trial is quickly brought to an end and there the "helpless" black stands before the judge. The sentence delivered by the judge: "Disturbance of the peace, Assault with intent to kill, These niggers, these everlasting niggers, always fighting, always shooting. They've got no sense. They'll never have no sense. Give'em the law, let'em feel it. Obedience, peace, peace. . . . Let this be a lesson. Sixty days, ninety days. Dig, dig."[31]

Unlike Green's other plays, Potter's Field (1929) does not have a single hero who is the champion of his philosophical idealism. The little community of Potter's Field, once a dumping ground on the outskirts of Durham and for sometime the community haven for those the world has never bothered about, is itself the hero of the piece. Its enemy, the white man's Law, threatens in the form of a road to the fine university which is to stretch itself ruthlessly through the very heart of Potter's Field and thus destroy those who live there because they have no place else to go. Throughout the play, in ominous counterpoint, the sounds of digging and blasting jar against the human rhythms of life in Potter's Field. Ironically enough, it is actually the residents of Potter's Field and other forlorn

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[31]Green, In the Valley and Other Carolina Plays, p. 42.

outcasts like them on the prison chain gang who must with their picks and shovels build the road under the threat of the whip that cuts into them when they falter.

Where is the idealism here? It is triumphantly present in the last scene when Tom Sterling, a former resident of Potter's Field, is shot by one of the chain gang guards. The frightened onlookers of the community, among whom is Milly Wilson, Tom's sweetheart, begin their low mournful singing; but Ed Uzzel, the quiet, philosophical derelict who had been known in his youth as "Bad Ed," jumps down into the road and takes Tom's place on the road-gang with the heroic cry, "Dig on the road to heaven! Digging toward the sun!" The blacks in the gang continue to raise their picks and let them fall, always with the same rhythm, never any faster or any slower, singing all the while the moving work-song:

They call their Jesus___ Hanh___

they call their Jesus___ Hanh

they mean their Jesus___ Hanh

Eigh, Lord.[32]

Here is the triumph of human suffering; the road itself is transfigured into the profound symbol of the painful way of life which aspires, nonetheless, because it is in the very nature of human life to aspire, and in this aspiration lies its nobility. What a magnificant thing this scene could be on stage with its

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[32]Paul Green, "Potter's Field," in Out of the South, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1939), p. 364.

grouped actors in various attitudes of prayer and exultation, its long line of diggers moving with insistent rhythm, each movement punctuated by the inevitable grunt, like an anguished heart-beat, and the singing which is the soul's defiant response to death and pain.

In Potter's Field (1929) Green has brought together almost all of his black motifs: superstition and conjure-magic; miscegenation; the crushing effects of poverty; the brutality of the chain-gang; the pure, childlike religious devotion. He has succeeded in fusing these largely through the ensemble technique of arranging dialogue by carefully grouping, harmonizing and counterpointing the many voices of Potter's Field: the gentle brutishness of Bad-Eye, the violence of Bantam, the prophetic sadness of Ed Uzzell, the strutting ragtime of Belle Utley, the mysterious malevolence of John Henry, the tender womanliness of Milly, all blend into a human harmony punctuated frequently by the cacophony of terror and discord.

In Potter's Field (1929) Green indicts the cruel and sadistic punishment inflicted upon the members of the chain gang. This theme is developed further in Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935). Green portrays the white man as the fateful, blind destroyer, forever creating misery for the helpless black man who has no control over the forces that govern his life. The white man consigns the black man to a life of ignorance, and in the mechanistic "progress" of himself, ignores the black man and plods wildly on, regardless of human suffering. Green conveys, in effective terms, the injustice of the white man who, in wiping out evil and poverty, creates more

by refusing to aid the black man.

Paul Green's great concern for justice, and his vehement crusade against capital punishment and other inhumane treatment of prisoners is given full treatment in Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935). In this play, Green expresses his full contempt for the horrors of a social blight--the state's prison system. The play vividly pictures the darker sides of the State's (North Carolina) prison system, and denounces the evil futility of killing a man because he has done wrong. "Change him, help him, change the society, the system which has produced him, but do not take away his life,"[33] pleads Green, the humanitarian.

Green is never afraid to grapple with common prejudice, and to make poetry out of the struggle as witness Hymn to the Rising Sun. He writes out of the life of his day and is concerned with all the people about him--with the lives they live and the deaths they die.[34]

The plot of the play grows out of the setting of a prison camp. As it develops, an endless parade of terrifying methods of punishment: the sweatbox, a filthy hole in the ground in which is enclosed a sickly black prisoner, the floggings, human waste, and disease are revealed. The sweatbox is a hole with a tin roof on to which the hot sun beats down. In this box men are confined for

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[33]Adams, Paul Green of Chapel Hill, p. 84.

[34]Edith Isaacs, "Paul Green, A Case in Point," p. 494.

weeks. The deaths which are brought on by beatings and disease which results from unsanitary conditions are recorded as heart failures. It is an effective piece of propagandistic drama filled with the evils and horrors of the penal system code.

Here, in Hymn to the Rising Sun, Green has contrasted the brutality of daily prison life of a prisoner with themes of justice as stated in the Constitution of the United States of America. The action takes place at sunrise in a prison camp. A young prisoner, Bright Boy, works himself into an emphatic nausea over the cries and whimpers of Runt, a black prisoner who is serving out his eleventh day in the tiny sweatbox as punishment for masturbation. For his display of sympathy for Runt, Bright Boy is flogged by the warden. After the flogging, the warden commands Bright Boy to sing "America" in honor of the Fourth of July, as Runt is dragged out of the box, dead. When the warden buries Runt, as he had requested, beneath the railroad tracks, he delivers a hypocritical eulogy on the spirit of Independence Day and American freedom. The play ends with the convicts marching off in lockstep, as an old man, who is the cook, absent-mindedly sings "America."

In one swift and brutal action, Green presents a scene of depravity and violence, one almost unbearable for an audience to see. The emotional intensity of Bright Boy's flogging and the appearance of Runt's body develop unexpectedly. The darkness at the opening of the play sets a mood of peace and security, only to give way slowly to the sunrise. The prisoners' awakening in the same way takes them out of their dream into the stark reality of the prison. When

the warden's sadistic, self-serving speeches are concluded, the violence erupts suddenly and then fades away just as fast into the final croaking of "America."

The prisoners are muted ciphers; dehumanized, they are alive only as they devise means for daily survival. The strongest of the prisoners is Pearly Gates, a black man. He endures only as an obvious bootlicker for the guards. This is done in a manner not different from all of the others who have carefully studied the warden's moods for their own protection. Only Bright Boy fails to guard himself; as a newcomer to the camp, he still believes he is his brother's keeper. His innocence literally upsets the other prisoners, for his sobs at night disturb their rest.

The Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935) depicts vividly the harsh, bitter, and sadistic punishment inflicted in the chain gang. Green is in open protest against every aspect of this penal institution: the sweatbox, the whip, the shackles, the hard, harsh treatment in language and in physical affliction by both warden and guard--the whole chain gang concept. Green emphasizes the fact that the chain gang is an institution of hard labor, of chains and weights, of vermin-filled bunks, of meals of grits, fatback, and corn bread, and of sadistic guards. It is an institution of cruel and domineering superintendents, of the sweatbox and its meals of bread and water, of the whip and twenty-nine lashes--altogether "a hell of a life."[35]

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[35]Green, This Body the Earth, p. 379.

From the point-of-view of emotional content, Hymn to the Rising Sun is Green's most powerful attack against the chain gang. In it he is vivid and frank. Green points out that the citizens are responsible for any change in that institution, for it is the citizens who elect the representatives who make laws concerning the chain gang. The citizens have only to vote for legislators who will act to destroy the evils of the chain gang. In Percival Wilde's book, Green writes:

> I agree that the chain gang is the matter of concern in Hymn to the Rising Sun, and not any sort of sex vagary. . . . Runt is what he is because the system is what it is, and the system obtains as it does because of such fellows as Runt. But--and here the higher reality comes--the observer (you, others, myself) stands outside the vicious circle and sees that we must go back, far back, to start growing a different and happier society.[36]

Green's continued concern for social justice for the black man is given full expression in Native Son (1941). If anyone witnesses, or reads Native Son, it is easy to see why Green, the author of In Abraham's Bosom (1926) and Hymn to the Rising Sun (1935), joined forces with Richard Wright to turn the novel into a play. It was during the summer of 1940 when the collaboration of Green and Wright took place. The play was readied and in March of the following year produced at the St. James Theatre by Orson Wells and John Houseman.

In Bigger Thomas, the principal character in the drama, Green

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[36] Contemporary One-Act Plays from Nine Countries, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936, p. 3.

found a victim to be rescued and a set of crippling hindrances to human dignity that demanded a public examination of conscience. The list of bigots who preyed upon the black man in his earlier works included only the white Southerner. In Native Son, he saw a vivid treatment of the racial situation far beyond the Southern area. Green knew that the nature of the material would antagonize people in the North, and in the South, but he felt that Wright and he would be able to translate the basic human truth of the novel and thereby benefit society.

The action of the play takes place in Chicago. Bigger Thomas, who is twenty years old, is the eldest son of the Thomas family, which is on welfare. As the play opens, Bigger is arguing with his sister, Vera, about Miss Emmet, who is a social worker. In the argument, Vera belittles Bigger for not having a job. Their mother, Hannah, tries to quiet them and settle the matter. Buddy, the younger brother, admires Bigger, his big brother, with a sort-of hero worship. This is especially true when Bigger kills a rat which Buddy shows off to the social worker as a sign of Bigger's strength.

As the plot progresses, Hannah, is left with no money except for fifty cents which she gives to Bigger to buy enough soap to do the washing which she takes in. While he is out, Bigger meets some of his friends and agrees to join in a robbery. In the meantime, Bigger receives word that his job application has been approved and he is to begin work as a chauffeur for a millionaire named Dalton. Bigger decides to take the job. Bigger reports to work at the home of the Dalton's. He is interviewed by Mr. Dalton and his blind wife.

Subsequently he is hired. His duties are fully described to him by one of the Dalton's maids, Peggy. He is assigned the additional duty by Dalton's daughter, Mary, of serving as her personal escort and protector.

On his first night at the Dalton's, he had to escort Mary to a meeting and party. She is interested in the activities of the Communists, and on that night she tries to treat Bigger as her equal. Jan Erlone and Edward Max, an elderly lawyer, are, also, interested in the Communist theories and ideas, and hope to spread them. At a group party, Mary gets drunk and Bigger has to take her home. When they arrive at home Bigger has to carry her up to her room. The thought of a black man in a white woman's bedroom frightens Bigger. In order to keep Mary from revealing that he is in the room with her, he presses a pillow down over her face, accidentally smothering her. The thought that he has murdered a white woman causes him to panic. To conceal the accident, he takes the body downstairs and pushes it into the furnace.

The next day Mary does not show up at the train station for a trip to Detroit. Jan is at the station to see her off. Since she is not there, he becomes concerned and telephones the Dalton's home. No one has seen her, and as a result a search is on to find her.

Bigger, in the meantime, tells his girlfriend, Clara, of the situation and wants her to help him in an extortion plot. In Clara's room, Bigger writes a kidnap letter demanding ten thousand dollars for information concerning the whereabouts of Mary.

Jeff Britten, a private detective and local politician, tries

to get some information from Bigger about Mary. In the meantime, Erlone is suspected. The First Newspaperman concentrates upon Bigger and discovers an earring in the ashes of the furnace. Bigger, upon learning this, goes into hiding. He takes Clara with him. The hunt is on for Bigger who is now suspected of murder. Clara and he are found hiding in an abandoned building. Bigger tries to protect himself from the guns of his pursuers by placing Clara in front of him. Clara is shot, and Bigger is apprehended and brought to trial. Max, Bigger's lawyer, pleads strongly that he is a black American who is the victim of racial prejudices and animosities. Max explains to the court that Bigger is a victim of the educational system in this country, and that the public is to be blamed for Bigger's crime.[37]

Paul Green, in Native Son, deals with conditions of the black man's life somewhat unlike those he knows on the Eastern shores of North Carolina. The incident here is Northern, but results are very similar. Bigger has a hatred for white people. The blacks in this play have the feeling of being at the bottom. Bigger also recognizes social and economic injustices, as well as feelings of frustration whenever he tries to build a better life for himself. Green's other plays usually end with the black man realizing that he is being crushed lower and lower by his environment from which he cannot extricate himself. Bigger, in this play is resentful. The way he is treated is responsible for Bigger's committing the crime. He was drawn

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[37]Green and Wright, Native Son, p. 127.

into such action by various ills of society--free thinking, excessive drinking, tragic social reforms and bare radicalism.[38]

The play is a sweeping indictment of racial oppression and prejudices, and of economic deprivation. Max, the lawyer, says in his speech during the trial that Bigger is the symbol of wrong growing out of the social structure of the nation.[39] The wrong is not only in the social and industrial structure, but housed also in the thinking of Bigger that the black man finds himself hemmed in, while, on the other hand, he learns in school that he is as free as the white man. Consequently, the black man knows frustration, confusion, fear, hate, and violence.

However, Green and Wright tried to show in their treatment that Bigger does not go wrong because he is black, but largely because of his feeling of inferiority--a thing for which society is definitely to blame. The same may happen to any man of any color. Max says to Bigger that color only makes it easier to be singled out in a white man's world.[40] Here again is Green's philosophy that the individual must begin to believe in himself; he must not project blame for his own shortcoming upon society.[41] Max continues his discussion with Bigger as he tries to point out to Bigger that within a race people

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[38] Owens, "Social Thought and Criticism of Paul Green," p. 238.

[39] Green and Wright, Native Son, p. 126.

[40] Ibid., p. 140.

[41] Loc. cit.

treat each other of the same race just as badly as they treat members of the other race.

Native Son (1941) is mainly concerned with the individual in conflict with society. It is also concerned with social reform and the color of the skin. The author expresses the idea that Bigger Thomas, a black man, is a result of wrong and evils growing out of the social and industrial structure of the nation. There should be no Bigger Thomas because there is no need for one. Yet, the individual cannot shift upon society all the blame for his condition. He has a responsibility for working out his own problems in a socially acceptable way.

In Native Son, Green is concerned with the task of what he calls the fourth chapter of democracy--the chapter of togetherness. On the problem of writing such a chapter, Green is quoted by Hoke Norris:

> In the American Theory we have a way of stimulating first by the theory of equality, and then we have tokens that frustrate. Every year we stimulate college boys and tell them to go forth and there's no place to go.
>
> This is not altogether confined to one race. We have sixteen million people who mainly because of their color don't have the opportunity we have. In a democracy every tub should stand on its own bottom--everybody ought to have a chance to develop his talents.[42]

Bigger Thomas could have gotten a job shining shoes, but he didn't want that and, perhaps, his ability was far above that. But

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[42]Hoke Norris, News story dated, July 30, 1940, Chapel Hill, in The News and Observer, July 31, 1940, in Clipping File, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

he was frustrated and he committed a horrible crime, as the only way he could express himself. So we've never written the fourth chapter of democracy, and that chapter should be cooperation.

Green has consistently crusaded for the equal rights of the black race, and he has insisted upon justice at every level for every man. Social theories do lie at the base of a government, but they do not have value unless there is very careful carrying out and application of the law. Again Green's concern for the black man's equality appeared in a letter sent to Theodore Dreiser on April 11, 1932, concerning the Scottsboro case. In it he accuses Dreiser and the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners of sacrificing the black boys in Scottsboro. In the same letter he begs Dreiser and the members of the National Committee for the Defense of political Prisoners to stop trying to hang their political theories around the necks of the black boys in Scottsboro. Green insisted that they were not political prisoners, but prisoners of a local "attitude of ignorance, prejudice, hate and fear." He tells Dreiser that any outside interference, or new argument, would only inflame the situation and eventually destroy the boys.[43]

Green's lifelong commitment to seeking justice for the black race not only permeated his writing as an insistent theme, but, also helped in shaping other contemporary attitudes. Green has fought for a long time alone, in an unfriendly South, for universal equality, to

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[43] A letter to Henry Grady Owens from Paul Green dated October 9, 1941.

afford the black man his rightful position of dignified freedom and unrestricted opportunity. Green, through Abraham, spoke to the matter: 'We want our children and our grandchildren to march on toward full lives and noble characters. . . . Color hadn't ought to count. It's the man, it's the man that lasts."[44]

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[44]Green, Paul Green: Five Plays of the South, p. 161.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

At the start of this study it was presumed that a revelation of themes and social criticism of Paul Green dealing with the plight of the black man could be one of several possible interpretations that can be made of the man and his works.

Social movements and theories such as socialism and communism have never attracted Green. While other writers of his day joined or became addicted to them, he concerned himself with conditions in his state. In all of his writing and in his own life, he seemed to have indicated that the way of individualism and free enterprise is the desirable condition for men. This does not mean, of course, that he is not aware of social injustices and the desirability of removing them. Nevertheless, for Green, it does mean that he believes the better way of getting rid of them is through the due process of law and normal social change. Good sense and good judgment have made him willing to confine his writing to the area of his own observation and knowledge. Passion for justice for the black man and the sharecropper led in his thinking to a passion for justice for all humanity, a belief in democracy as a way of human righteousness. He is not a militant crusader for change in the social order.

Green's work has shown both consistency and the power to expand--consistency in the underlying theme of compassion for and

championship of those who are denied basic human rights; expansion in enlarging these themes to an application beyond the bounds of locality. Green is interested, however, in protecting the right of an individual to think politically as he pleases, and he is not quick to condemn theories held by others. He carefully analyses them, as the philosopher, seeking "to separate the truth from the specious,"[1] to use the true, and to throw away the false.

Green's folk-dramas served their purpose well. They were used as a means toward social commentary. Through them, Green was able to show his concern for the black man and, as a whole, for humanity. Green's folk-plays were very candid in displaying the low-life and ignorance that were the lot of the black race. They were painful and unpleasant at times, which reenforces Jessie Faust's statement that the problems with which the plays dealt were for God to witness and solve. They were too huge for mortal man. He was one of the folk, and he observed and commented on life as one of them. The following conclusions have been reached in this study: that Paul Green is--

1. a folk-dramatist
2. a social critic
3. a social interpreter
4. a believer in the democratic form of government
5. a believer in the upward march of humanity.

In short, Green's social concern and psychological probing, his attitudes and his refusal to condemn humanity for its ills have not changed. There has been no sharp change in his point of view, in his life, or in his works. It still holds that his philosophy of life and his display of it is basic--that the world of man is constantly changing into a better way of human relationship, and that it is the individual's responsibility to make his own way, and to offer to others whatever aid he can on his way up and thus have a part in the onward march of humanity.

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[1] Owens, "Social Thought and Criticism of Paul Green," p. 330.

APPENDIX

Paul Green's Negro Plays

Blackbeard,	1921
Granny Boling,	1921
Sam Tucker,	1921
Wrack P'int,	1921--(Not published)
Day by Day,	1923--(Not published)
The Cup of Fury,	1923--(Not published)
Your Fiery Furnace,	1923
The Dry Tree,	1925--(Not published)
In The Valley,	1927
The Goodbye,	1928

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