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PAUL GREEN OF CHAPEL HILL

AGATHA BOYD ADAMS

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Paul Green of Chapel Hill

by Paul Green

1917 Trifles of Thought
1925 The Lord's Will and Other Carolina Plays
1926 Lonesome Road, Six Plays for the Negro Theatre
1927 The Field God and In Abraham's Bosom
1928 In the Valley and Other Carolina Plays
1928 Wide Fields
1931 The House of Connelly and Other Plays
1932 The Laughing Pioneer
1935 Roll, Sweet Chariot
1935 This Body the Earth
1935 Shroud My Body Down
1937 Johnny Johnson
1937 The Lost Colony
1939 The Enchanted Maze
1939 Out of the South
1941 The Highland Call
1941 Native Son (*with Richard Wright*)
1943 The Hawthorn Tree
1945 Forever Growing
1946 Salvation on a String
1948 The Common Glory
1949 Dog on the Sun

by Agatha Boyd Adams

1929 Contemporary Spanish Literature in English Translation *(with N. B. Adams)*
1936-46 Adventures in Reading *(eleven numbers)*
1941 The Old North State
1944 Nature Writers in the United States
1945 A Journey to Mexico
1948 Contemporary Negro Art
1949 John Charles McNeill: a Biographical Sketch
1950 Thomas Wolfe, Carolina Student: a Brief Biography
1951 Paul Green of Chapel Hill

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PAUL GREEN OF CHAPEL HILL

by

AGATHA BOYD ADAMS

Edited by Richard Walser

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PREFACE

"This biography has been written in response to a need for a book about Paul Green," Agatha Adams noted early this year. "There has been a steadily growing expression of interest in his personality and his work, not only from North Carolina, about whose people he has written so lovingly and faithfully, but from all over the United States. His reputation has increased greatly since he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1927, but no biographical study of him has been published since Barrett Clark's sketch, which appeared over twenty years ago . . . . Paul Green is still actively productive; a complete analysis and evaluation of his work must await the future literary critic and historian. The story is told here as far as possible in Paul Green's own words, or in those of his contemporaries."

Sitting at her desk in the Library Extension Department at Chapel Hill, Agatha Adams had pondered for some time the requests which came for information about various Tarheel writers. The demand was always greater than the availability of the scattered clippings which she had to send out. As the need had to be met, she took upon herself the task of gathering together all the sources, and then of writing down the stories of those authors most frequently inquired about. To what might have resulted in humdrum monographs, she lent her considerable talents as a writer. In 1949 appeared her biographical sketch of John Charles McNeill, in 1950 her study of Thomas Wolfe. Even before she started research upon these two, she had begun the writing of her story of Paul Green. She read everything about him in the University library; she talked with Green himself, with his family and friends. As she wrote, the pages mounted higher and higher. It was eventually apparent that this was no "brief biography," but a full-length study. Finally when she had finished and when she

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realized that it would have to be considerably reduced before it could be included in the series published by the University of North Carolina Library, she jotted down the principles for its revision. Her death in March left the task uncompleted.

Born, bred, and educated in Virginia, Agatha Boyd Adams had lived most of her adult life in North Carolina, where her husband is professor of Spanish at the University. She came to love her adopted state, a love which she proved by the workmanship of the series of biographies which the present one concludes. Her facility in languages, her competence as a librarian, her ability as a writer were characteristics highly regarded by those who knew her; and her admirers were many.

The editor, in preparing the present manuscript for publication, has carried out as faithfully as he could the plans which Mrs. Adams left for revision. Principal deletions are lengthy commentaries on the plays and a few long passages on Paul Green's private life. In the main, only two additions have been inserted, and those for the sake of completeness: the note on the Bollingen Award in section XXIV, and section XXVI entire.

The original manuscript is deposited in the University of North Carolina Library, where it will be available for reading by all serious students of Paul Green and his place in the history of the American drama.

R. W.

Department of English
North Carolina State College
Raleigh
23 October 1950

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Part I

". . . the true theatre must live
and be among the people. . . ."

I. EARLY YEARS

JUST AFTER World War I, the Lillington *Cats* could beat any other baseball team in Harnett County. During the long hot eastern North Carolina summer, all the other little communities, Angier and Coats and Dunn, Fuquay Springs and Christian Light and Chalybeate, had to admit that the Lillington team could usually outplay them. At least one reason for the *Cats'* strength was their pitcher, a tall broad-shouldered young man who could pitch fast balls with his left arm as well as with his right: His name was Paul Green.

The Harnett County News enjoyed recording his exceptional skill. "Green, Lillington's star twirler, allowed the Bensonites only one bingle . . . Paul sure had 'em guessing. Left, right: left, right, is the way he handed it to the Lee County lads . . . Green, the ambidextrous star of the *Cats*, held the strong Sanford aggregation to three hits. . . ." He could slug them at the bat, too. "Paul Green just can't keep from hitting 'em . . . Zachery (from Raleigh) says that Paul Green throws the crookedest ball he ever struck at. . . ."

The twirler made news in other ways, although it appeared in much less gaudy language. On February 10, 1921, the local newspaper carried on the front page the headline PAUL GREEN, PLAYWRIGHT, over a notice that "The Miser" and "The Old Man of Edenton," by "Paul Eliot Green of Lillington, one of the most successful of the local playwrights," were to be produced in Chapel Hill. This is probably the first public indication of the gifted pitcher's major talent. Not many months later, a modest statement announced that a Kenan Fellowship in Philoso-

phy for graduate study at the University of North Carolina had been awarded to Paul Green.

Already the outline of a many-sided personality had begun to take shape. Who was this young man who could star in professional baseball, write plays, and win awards in philosophy? It seemed a long stretch from a dusty Harnett County diamond to the remote heights of Kant and Hegel. People around Lillington knew him as one of Mr. William Green's boys, from a farm in the Pleasant Union neighborhood. He had gone to Buie's Creek Academy, had taught school, had fought overseas in the war, had gone up to the University. Some said that he wrote poetry, and it was generally known that aside from poetry, philosophy, and playwriting, he was a mighty man at stripping fodder and picking cotton.

William Archibald and Betty (Byrd) Green, the dramatist's parents, were descendants of the English and Scotch settlers of the Cape Fear region. Before the Civil War, his paternal grandfather, John Green, owned a large plantation operated by slaves. John Green had been a member of the County Court, and in 1860 had been responsible for building the first school house and employing the first teacher in that section. He, like most of his neighbors, lost practically all his property during the Civil War. He died just at its close.

Betty (Byrd) Green's father, William Byrd, was a preacher and singing teacher, and had composed several hymns. His intense love of music caused him on one occasion, after losing his temper in an argument over some fine point in music, to dash off to the University of North Carolina to settle the dispute, leaving a wife and several children at home. He did not graduate at the University, but stayed there long enough to satisfy his curiosity. By all accounts, this grandfather possessed a strong and vivid personality. His artistic interest and, according to local standards, "queer ways" brought him into conflict with the narrow Calvinism of the community. There is even a story that once he was turned out of the church because he had strayed from the rigid standards of his neighbors.

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Betty Byrd inherited her father's musical gifts. As a girl she studied the organ at Buie's Creek Academy. Her teacher, Nolie Benson, remembered her as a "bright-eyed girl, a great dreamer, and smart as a whip." After she became Mrs. William Green, she played the organ in the country church. And she saw to it that there was always music in the Green home.

Her husband, William Archibald Green, owned and worked a large farm in one of the most fertile regions of the state. Most of his acres were planted in cotton, the favorite "money crop" of his day. Like practically all the other farmers of Harnett County, he "lived at home," in the saying of the country; that is, he raised on the place in abundance, the food which the family needed. On the farm he employed both white and Negro tenant labor. He was known in his section as a hard-working, progressive, and successful farmer, liked and respected by all who had dealings with him. *The Harnett County News* described him as "one of our most popular and highly esteemed citizens in this section."

Paul Green was born March 17, 1894. His father, William Green, had three children by an earlier marriage, all of them considerably older than the family of his second marriage. Betty Green's first child, Lura, died in infancy. Her second baby was Mary; and the third, Paul. All the children looked somewhat alike, distinguished by curly hair, clear gray eyes, and well-cut features.

They were brought up to share in the work of the farm. Paul knew all the chores which fall to a boy's lot on a big farm: driving home the cows, splitting wood, keeping the kitchen woodbox filled, setting out young plants, chopping cotton, spreading guano, feeding chickens and pigs. The Green children also had the freedom of the woods, the fields, and the river. They went

wading and swimming in the near-by streams, fished for catfish and yellow-bellies in the creeks, set rabbit traps, gathered chinquapins to string in long chains, made whips of the inner skin of mulberry bark, and chased lightning bugs in the summer twilights to put into glass jars full of vile-smelling incandescence. One of Paul's great joys always was to build. He and his brother Hugh shared this enthusiasm and made the most of all the opportunities afforded by the acres of woodland and the miles of creeks and the availability of old bricks and lumber. The boys built dams across the small streams to spread the water into pools for wading; they built forts against wild Indians for hunters and pioneers; they built hideouts and club houses. Their building operations covered almost a mile, from Neil's Creek on the west edge of the farm to Buie's Creek on the east. One of Paul's most successful building undertakings was a playhouse for his younger sisters; its two rooms were large enough for Erma and Caro Mae to walk around in.

In another building venture Paul and Hugh set up a store in partnership with a Negro playmate, Thornton, the son of tenants. The store bore across the front a sign painted in tar in big straggly letters, "Green and Thornton." Their stock in trade consisted of such items as tobacco, candy, chewing gum, coffee, and baking soda. Most of the goods were either eaten by the proprietors or given away, and the enterprise lasted only a few weeks. Paul hunted 'possums and squirrels with Negro boys, went fishing with them, learned along with them the lore of woods and water. Race prejudice undoubtedly pervaded the neighborhood climate, but it never had conscious expression in the Green house.

Paul Green's interest in music had been aroused early. Mrs. Green used to play and sing for her children such old hymns and songs as "How Sweet the Sound," "Helen of Kirkonnel Lea," and the "Lament of Flora Macdonald." She taught music to her older children, especially Gladys, who showed exceptional

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talent, but as the family became larger she could not spare the hours for formal teaching. By the time that Paul had grown old enough to begin five-finger exercises, there were too many younger children for her to spend time at the piano with him or to compel him to practice. She always seemed to feel that Paul was the exceptional child, and teaching him to play would have given her the keenest pleasure.

From his mother, Paul inherited not only an enthusiasm for music, but also a great love of reading. Mrs. Green's father had owned a large library for that day and section, and she enjoyed reading from her early girlhood. Later, when she became the mother of a large family, she would frequently get up at four o'clock in the morning to read in peace before the houseful of children began to stir. William Byrd's library had been sold and scattered at the time of his death. That was unfortunate; for there were never many books in the Green home and no public library in the community, not even a Sunday School library. But all of the children grew up with an eagerness for books, and a wide-awake intellectual curiosity.

Paul's earliest introduction to the word "book" implanted deeply in him the conviction that books are important, even sacred. When he was about three years old, his mother took him to see his grandfather, an old gentleman with a long beard, lying ill in bed. The little boy reached for a book on a shelf by the bed and dropped it. His grandfather roared, "Take that brat out of here. I don't want him fooling with my books." Although that terrifying experience sometimes returned to him in nightmares, it also spurred his determination. Perhaps his grandfather's angry interdiction made books seem all the more desirable. Paul learned to read early. One of his favorite places to read was the well-house, where he could curl up with a book and enjoy himself apart from the noisy family and farm world. Such aloof behavior on Paul's part puzzled his practical father.

William Green would shake his head over his son's vagaries and say, "That boy's just like his grandfather, old Bill Byrd."

II. GROWING UP

The school to which the Green children went for six months of each year was about a mile away from the farm. To reach it, they had to cross a creek and to walk through woods of longleaf pine and holly, which remained green after the black oaks had lost their foliage. In the spring the mauve and white of redbud and dogwood sprinkled the woods. The schoolhouse was a one-room frame building, shabby and badly in need of paint. In winter, which can be sharp even in eastern North Carolina, a woodstove scorched the children near it and froze the taller pupils in the back row. A different teacher presided nearly every year; some of them were good, others almost illiterate. One of the best, J. A. Parham, later managing editor of *The Charlotte Observer*, boarded with the Green family. In after years he remembered Mary Green, the eldest daughter, as the brightest child he had ever taught. Mary, who never had the chance to continue her education, made a much deeper impression on this teacher than did Paul. Even though he failed to live in Parham's memory, Paul even in his days in the one-room school proved himself a competent and conscientious student. He had an instinctive desire to excel in whatever he undertook, either in games or in studies.

This happy childhood of work and play, farm and school and the outside world, was interrupted for young Paul by a long illness in his tenth year. This illness had a marked effect on his life. No one at first knew what was the difficulty. His upper right arm became sore and painful and seemed to be wasting away. After the family doctor admitted that he did not understand it, his parents sent Paul to Johns Hopkins, where the trouble was diagnosed as osteomyelitis. An operation removed part of the bone of the upper arm and replaced it with a silver plate. During the period of the illness, which lasted for almost a year, Paul taught himself to write with his left hand. One can only guess what those months of pain and inactivity meant to a little boy accustomed to the freedom of the country. It is certain that the sensitive imagination and the vivid memory which have found expression in his poetry came to help him in the seclusion of illness. Perhaps, in part at least, the young dreamer enjoyed that seclusion.

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The real significance of the illness in the shaping of his character is to be found in his determination to get well. When he returned home from the hospital, he learned to play baseball with his brothers and friends, and acquired that skill which was to distinguish him when he pitched for Lillington. He took every opportunity offered by farm work to build up his physique. He succeeded so completely that it is almost impossible to realize that he was ever ill. His appearance has always conveyed a sense of power and strength. The child who had been through a year of serious sickness grew up tall and robust, with a finely modeled head above his broad shoulders.

A second blow, much deeper and more far-reaching in the effects upon the developing personality of Paul Green, occurred when he was twelve. His mother died suddenly. She was still a young woman, only forty-three. The frightened little children were awakened in the middle of a cold rainy January night and called into their mother's room. Paul, the oldest boy, ran across the fields to get help from a neighbor.

Mrs. Green's death left fourteen-year-old Mary as the head of the family. The children remember that their practical, conscientious father was "singularly inept at household needs." The work of the big farm absorbed him completely, and his wife had

always managed the home. He must have been bewildered at finding himself alone with a flock of small children, and turned to steady level-headed Mary for the direction of the family. At fourteen Mary Green met her sudden responsibility admirably well, becoming mother, counsellor, and confidante to the whole family.

Meanwhile, in his determination to overcome the handicap of his illness, Paul Green threw himself into the work of the farm so wholeheartedly that he developed unusual skill and muscular strength. Pulling fodder was in those days considered one of the most difficult and heaviest of farm chores. The tough leaves of corn had to be pulled down from the standing stalks and hung up to dry before being made into bundles for feed. Paul could pull fodder faster than any one of his section. As he grew taller, he found that the job of cotton-picking was even more back-breaking; but his performance was so rapid that in a contest he was adjudged the champion cotton-picker of Harnett County.

After Paul Green had gone as far as possible in the local school, he entered nearby Buie's Creek Academy, which has since been re-named Campbell College, in honor of its founder. In the somewhat shabby buildings of this old-fashioned Baptist school, he had the good fortune to find a gifted teacher in the founder, James Archibald Campbell.

Every morning he walked the two and half miles from home to Buie's Creek. School was out at four o'clock in the afternoon. After walking home, he would do his farm chores, eat supper, and on Friday nights walk back to the Academy again for a meeting of the debating society. He certainly never felt sorry for himself; in fact, he felt pleased that he was privileged to do all this.

At the Academy Paul also had his first experiences in public speaking. One commencement he delivered the oration for his society. The oration was of course written by the speaker himself. The society also had a representative who delivered the declamation, a discourse written by some great person in history—Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, or any other selection giving expression to high ideals and the will to do great deeds. The fact that Paul chose to give the oration instead of the declamation was another example of his ambition and his urge to put his thoughts on paper. Gold medals were awarded to the winners, and while Paul did not win, his written speech was obviously superior. The trouble was that he failed to deliver it with assurance and forensic flourishes. It did not "catch on."

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Before he graduated from the Academy, Paul Green had made up his mind that he wanted to go to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Mr. Campbell used all of his influence, which was considerable, to persuade him to choose Wake Forest College instead. There, in a small denominational school, the soul of his favorite pupil would presumably be safe in the shelter of the Baptist orthodoxy of the period. The University, nonsectarian by its charter, had a reputation for liberalism if not for downright free-thinking. But his efforts failed, and Paul remained firm in his choice of the University.

It was not, however, possible for him to go to Chapel Hill the year he graduated from the Academy. His father, with a family of young children, could not afford to send him to college, and Paul set about raising the money for himself. One of his resources was to play professional baseball for Lillington. He continued this for several summers, even after he had entered the University. Another way of earning money was to teach school. In September 1914 he became principal of the school at Olive Branch in upper Harnett County, about half a mile from the village of Kipling. His staff consisted of one teacher, besides himself. He was only nineteen, and some of the boys and girls he taught and disciplined were not much younger. But they

knew his prowess on the diamond, and that increased his prestige. He served as principal of this school for two years, and accumulated what he considered enough money to pay his way at the University.

At long last the great day came: he was ready to go to the University. With little money either in his pocket or available in the bank in Lillington, he told his family good-by. He was several years older than the average freshman, but he reasoned he could do the four years' work in three. He mounted the high two-horse wagon, took his place beside his father, and off they drove to the railroad station four miles away.

III. THE UNIVERSITY

Paul Green reached Chapel Hill on a hot September day in 1916. As the train approached the college town, the long high ridges of Orange County had almost a suggestion of mountains to the boy from the flat expanses of Harnett County. This same region seemed dull and ugly to Thomas Wolfe, when he came to it from Asheville that same year, with the glories of the Blue Ridge fresh in his memory. The Piedmont section of North Carolina has no spectacular beauty, but a subdued loveliness which grows with familiarity. The Chapel Hill ridge is one of those spurs which stretch out like giant fingers to hold the eastward sloping plains.

After a long ride on a coach sooty from soft coal smoke, Paul landed, along with other freshmen and returning students, at a siding called University Station, some ten miles out in Orange County from the University. Here he changed to another train which brought him, not to Chapel Hill, but to the near-by village of Carrboro. The incoming students were hailed by Negro hack

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drivers calling the names of their boarding houses and competing for the favor of driving the newcomers into the village.

Chapel Hill has always had somewhat the look of a town in a forest clearing. The woods come close to the town, and the town reaches out into the woods. In 1916 the village consisted of a few streets of frame houses, most of them white and always with comfortable porches and yards, set around the edges of a leafy campus arched by tall oaks. The business district was only one block long.

It was in the gathering shadows of another war that Paul Green entered the University, and his stay was consequently brief. He at first lived in Smith Dormitory but soon moved out and found a room of his own in a private home. The little boy who liked to read in the well-house had grown up into a man who needed solitude and space for his thoughts. The noise, the rough and tumble crowding of a dormitory were not for him. Already, also, he was more serious about his work than the average college freshman; he had had to work and save to get there, and he was determined to reach out and take all that the University could give.

The room in which Paul Green lived during his freshman year was in a house on Franklin Street, where the Methodist Church now stands. He remembers that his landlady there had two great prides: her frequently asserted kinship to President Woodrow Wilson, and her musical ability. She used to call her students in to listen and applaud while she played the piano and sang.

Paul, the solitary and dreamer, found delight in walking through the woods that stretch southward from the campus toward Morgan's Creek. Here an intricate web of vague paths, worn by generations of picnic-loving students, led to such favorite spots as the Meeting of the Waters and Laurel Hill.

But it was not only enchantment that Freshman Paul found in his rambles around Chapel Hill. If he explored westward instead of south, he found the shanty town of the Negroes, tumbling over some of the most sweetly curved hillsides in the vicinity and looking toward some of the widest views. These unpainted cabins, tar-paper shacks, and outhouses were probably the first view of a Negro slum for the country boy; and they made a deep impression on him. Here were the "Tin Top Alleys," the cafes where fights got started on Saturday nights, the small frame churches of boisterous worship and equally boisterous grief, the crowded boarding houses, the barber shops that served as clubs, the gathering places for song and guitar playing and banjo picking.

During his freshman year Paul Green studied hard. The student weekly newspaper, *The Tar Heel*, published in February 1917 a list of twenty freshmen with the highest grades. The list included Paul Green, but not Thomas Wolfe, his classmate. In addition to studying, Paul also found time for writing. His poems appeared frequently that year in *The Carolina Magazine*. Most of them show little talent. In May the young poet exclaimed:

> O awake thee, my love, for the dawn's breaking fast,
> And a soft light is bathing the hills;
> All the joy of the morn since the long night is past
> Like old wine through my soul strangely thrills.

A sketch in the same number of *The Magazine*, "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 evening cries of whippoorwills and katydids. "Bats fly zig-zag, catching insects. Bull frogs boom." Such love of rural detail fills the poetry of his mature writing.

From the point of view of his future development as a playwright, the most significant thing that happened during Paul's first year at Carolina was that he wrote a play, won a prize for it, and saw it produced. "Norman Foerster, who was one of the finest English teachers ever to appear at the University of North Carolina, announced in class one day," says Green, "that the seniors had decided to do a play at Commencement and were holding a contest for original scripts. He advised me to try my hand. I took a chance at the thing and happened to win out."

This prize-winning play, called "Surrender to the Enemy," told, in the author's words, of "a Southern gal's heart surrender to a Yankee captain, in opposition to her father's wishes." The story was based on a Chapel Hill scandal just after the Civil War, when Ellie Swain, the University President's daughter, married Brigadier-General Smith B. Atkins of the United States Army, a romance which upset the little community and may have been indirectly responsible for the closing of the University. The imitative style of this first attempt of Green's at playwriting has little relation to his later work. He has himself suggested that his manuscript may have been the only one submitted in the contest.

"Surrender to the Enemy" was produced in the Forest Theatre, which had in those days none of the stone towers, walls, and seats which now adorn it. A hillside cleared in the woods and sloping down to a little glade, it had the grace of tall trees to frame the stage, and on a late spring evening, the fragrance of honeysuckle and the sparkle of fireflies. The audience sat on rugs or pillows, digging their heels into the soft earth to keep from slipping. Up this hill Paul Green stumbled and fled the night of his first play, frightened by "the life and blood of the thing" in action on the stage, and embarrassed by the whispers of "There he goes!" "And then the awful giggles and titters

that smote upon my tingling ears! I aged considerably before I reached the dark peace of my little old room. . . . That experience was what could be called exquisite anguish."

The production of his prize-winning play was one of the last events of Paul's first year at the University. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to guess that from it came some of the impulse toward the outdoor plays of his mature years.

IV. WORLD WAR I

When Paul Green entered college, World War I was already in its third year. In April 1917 the United States declared war on Germany. The slogans of the period, the "war to end war" and the "battle for democracy," carried a powerful appeal for Paul Green the idealist, with his strong belief in human freedom. He did not wait, as he might well have done, to finish his freshman year at the University, but interrupted his studies to enlist.

Before going to France, he set up a little signpost. Although in those days money was far from plentiful for him, he paid a printer in Greenville, South Carolina, seventy dollars to print a small collection of his poems, with the title *Trifles of Thought by P. E. G.* These youthful verses show no unusual promise, though some of them have the flavor of his best writing. They are principally epitaphs, eulogies, war poems, and a few Negro dialect pieces. The poems themselves are unimportant, the act of publishing them significant.

During the war he served as private, corporal, sergeant and sergeant-major with the 105th Engineers, 30th Division, an outfit which was brigaded with the British Army. Later he became second lieutenant with the Chief of Engineers at Paris. Through this experience with an engineering division, he acquired a knowledge of surveying and considerable skill in map-making. This ability proved of service to him later in planning and designing the outdoor theatres at Campbell College, Manteo, Williamsburg, and Washington.

For four months of his war years Paul Green was in actual combat on the Western Front in Belgium. He has not at any time written or talked very intimately of this period. His service in the Army interrupted but did not fundamentally change the dream of the boy who had set himself the task of interpreting the folk of his own country; the close contact with human suffering, however, helped to widen his sympathies and to relate his segment of North Carolina to the whole world.

Two poems published in *The Carolina Magazine* after his return from France reflect his experience. The first, "Rebellion, a Song," by P. E. Greene (*sic*) appeared in November 1919. This rather brutal little piece on realistic trench warfare is a long way from the slightly May-mad freshman who was writing for the *Magazine* in the spring of 1917. The second war poem, published in December 1920 and called "Song of the Dead," expresses a loathing of war:

> We are the dead who speak
> After long nights of woe
> Hearing the wild shells shriek,
> The hurrying to and fro
> Of armies upon the hill,
> And dead men under the plain
> Broken and lying still
> Are cold in the falling rain.

Green's student poems indicate clearly that from the first he saw war, not as a spiritualizing experience, but as an ugly, wasteful, and stupid horror.

V. AGAIN AT THE UNIVERSITY

The University to which Paul Green returned as soon as possible after his war experience was alive and growing. An obscure young member of the faculty, Harry Woodburn Chase, had just been made president. He maintained the liberal tradition in which the University had been founded, and under his leadership it entered into a period of genuine intellectual growth.

Another returned soldier, Frank Porter Graham, who had seen service with the Marine Corps, taught history in Chapel Hill that fall and had been newly appointed Dean of Students. Archibald Henderson, versatile mathematician, biographer and historian, became one of the early sponsors of the Carolina Playmakers, an interest which was to continue actively. Edwin Greenlaw, Dean of the Graduate School and Head of the Department of English, fired his students with a love of Spenser's poetry, and stimulated younger teachers. Greenlaw taught Paul Green; so also did Norman Foerster and James Holly Hanford, both of the English Department. Horace Williams expounded his Hegelian philosophy.

In 1919, as he had before, Paul Green shunned the dormitories, and found quarters in a two-room cottage in the yard of an old house on Cameron Avenue, rooms which he shared with Bryce Little, now a lawyer in Seattle. The yard was crowded with old elms, crepe myrtles almost as tall as trees, and a pleasant wilderness of spirea and japonica and other flowering bushes. In this seclusion he found the quiet he needed for his task. Older than the average college student by two years of teaching and two more of war, he had no share in that adolescent loafing on the Carolina campus which Tom Wolfe enjoyed and described so nostalgically in *Look Homeward, Angel.*

In contrast to Wolfe's record, Paul Green's is that of a solitary and hard-working young man, who made slight impression

on his fellow students, and no effort at all for leadership in campus circles. The only club he joined besides the Harnett County Club was Sigma Upsilon, a writing club to which Wolfe also belonged. He never joined a social fraternity. In December 1919, with "Other Judases," a tale of western Carolina, he won the prize of five dollars in gold offered by *The Carolina Magazine* for the best short story submitted. He found no time for his favorite sport, baseball; but instead he played the violin with Mrs. J. M. Williams, a teacher and able musician who lived across Cameron Avenue from his rooms. He played remarkably well for one self-taught. But for the most part, he remained aloof from the usual pleasures of college life. In the *Yackety Yack* for his senior year there is no picture of him, and he is mentioned only as class poet. LeGette Blythe was voted the best writer in the class of 1921, and Jonathan Daniels the class prophet.

In spite, however, of his aloofness from student activities, Paul Green during his stay at the University felt the impact of some of the major influences which have had a share in shaping both his work and the course of his life. The teaching and the philosophy of Horace Williams made a profound impression on him and are to a considerable degree reflected in his later writing.

Many of Horace Williams' students worshipped him almost in the manner of disciples. A missionary at heart, he had committed himself zealously to the task of waking up the minds of youth. The philosophy he taught was strongly rooted in Hegelianism, but even more strongly in the whole soul and individuality of the man. In teaching he ceaselessly endeavored to question, to stir curiosity. The facile, the stereotyped, the pat answer aroused his impatience. He compelled his students to concentrate on the essence of the thing, the "Begriff." As a prod to drowsing minds he frequently reversed or gave a new twist to a statement previously made; he exalted the virtue of inconsistency; he was a master of equivocation, of the technique of shifting

ground. A student would invariably protest. "But, Dr. Williams, last week you said . . . ," in answer to which he would drawl, "O, Mr. Smith, haven't I taught you anything? Haven't I changed you at all?" Not every one responded to this individual mode of teaching; and the irreverent and skeptical on the campus referred to him as the "Horse" and attempted to bait and trap him. But many of those who did respond to his teaching drew from it the direction and set of their adult lives. One of them, Thomas Wolfe, said: "He communicated his own alertness, his originality, his power to think."

In the increasing mysticism of Green's more mature writing and in his concern with spiritual values may be found an echo of such statements of Horace Williams as "The material is the shadow of things—the spiritual alone abides." Student Paul Green found in Williams a teacher whose ideals were congenial with his own. Williams led him to elect philosophy as his major subject, to spend two years of graduate study in philosophy, and in his later life to devote considerable time to exploring the writings of the Hindu mystics.

VI. THE CAROLINA PLAYMAKERS

Horace Williams led Paul Green toward philosophy, but at the same time another strong influence drew him toward the writing of plays. In 1918, while Green was still in France, Professor Greenlaw persuaded Frederick H. Koch to come to Chapel Hill from the University of North Dakota, where he was already reputed as an apostle of folk-drama. The Carolina Playmakers were established that year. Green's interest in playwriting had of course been quickened by his prize-winning freshman play:

> After that though [he said] I didn't set my heart on playwriting, for I had always been more interested in poetry and short stories than anything else. Then in 1919 Proff Koch came riding in from the Dakota prairies, his arms full of plays and his head full of dreams. In no time a stage was set up, and everybody near and far, little and big, black and white realized for the first time that he, said body, was an artist of some sort—mainly a dramatic artist . . . . I chose the last. And after a few productions, I was caught fast in my choice and had struck acquaintance with all the bat-like terrors that inhabit the shadows of the stage.

Frederick Koch was a thin, wiry enthusiast with a big idea and the gift of making his enthusiasms contagious. In teaching young people to write, he insisted that they write of what they knew first-hand, the familiar, the well-remembered; he directed them to the natural, historical, and legendary folklore of that region which they had known from childhood. Barrett Clark, who knew the man and his work intimately, says that to Koch "the theatre was something not apart from life, but literally a part of life. He helped to make the theatre a function of life and a means of interpretation." Proff, as he was always called on the Carolina campus, possessed to a high degree the ability to release the creative spark in his students. The fact that this able impresario was at hand when Paul Green returned from France marks a significant point in the latter's development as a writer. He found a teacher ready to encourage his ambitions and to work with him, and also he found a stage equipped to produce his plays. By the fall of 1919 the Carolina Playmakers were already a working organization with facilities set up for producing plays, and all the excitement of a fresh experiment. It seems quite possible that had this not been true, had not the Playmakers been at that time the most lively creative group on the campus, Green might not have become a playwright at all.

The philosophy of playmaking which urged Paul Green toward the rich fund of legend, folkways, human tragedy and comedy of the eastern Carolina countryside, he has stated as follows:

> Most of the plays I have written can be designated as folk plays, and I know this seems a narrow boundary. Perhaps it is, but since the "folk" are the people

who seem to matter most to me, I have little interest in trying to deal with others who are more foreign and therefore less real to me. Not for a moment do I claim to have done justice to an inspiring subject matter, but the challenge is there, clearer, sharper, more compelling every day. For there is something in the life of "the people" which seems of deeper significance so far as the nature of the universe goes than the characters who might be termed sophisticated . . . .

The first play to be produced by the Carolina Playmakers was "When Witches Ride," by Elizabeth Lay. "The most effective plays produced this year were written by Elizabeth Lay and Harold Williamson," says the 1919 *Yackety Yack*, thus slighting Thomas Wolfe's "The Return of Buck Gavin," also produced that year. Elizabeth Lay graduated from the University in June 1919, but continued her connection with the Playmakers, with the imposing title of Field Agent for the Bureau of Community Drama of the Extension Division of the University. It was through her work with the Playmakers that she first met Paul Green when he returned to the University in 1919. She designed the set for the first of his plays which the Playmakers produced, "The Last of the Lowries," during the season of 1920-1921. Two more of Green's plays were produced that same season: "The Miser, A Farm Tragedy," and "The Old Man of Edenton, a Melodrama of Colonial Carolina." By the following year, the friendship of Paul and Elizabeth had progressed to the point of writing a play together: "Blackbeard, Pirate of the Carolina Coast." This collaboration was the beginning of a life partnership.

The years which Paul Green spent at the University, his studies and his association with the Playmakers, left strong imprints which are observable in his later work. While it is not possible to question the actuality of these influences, an evaluation of their precise strength and extent presents considerable difficulty. It may be suggested that many critics of his plays, especially of the earlier symphonic plays, have admitted to a sense of confusion, and that his audiences have at times been bewildered. Does this lack of clarity, this wavering ambivalence, stem from the classroom of Horace Williams, that master of evasion and equivocation? And was it altogether fortunate that the enticements of playmaking attracted the young poet from Harnett County? No reader of Paul Green's plays and novels can fail to realize that at heart he is essentially a poet. Not only in the lyrics which gem most of his plays, and the frankly poetic dramas, but even in his most realistic prose, poetry is implicit. In his delight in natural beauty, his ability to evoke a mood, his brooding humanity, his gropings toward the inexpressible, there is poetry. Might these qualities have found freer expression in poetry unhampered by rules of drama? And finally, how account for that angry resentment toward conventional education expressed later in *The Enchanted Maze* and *Forever Growing*? Surely these are not the expressions of a man who felt that his creative gifts had been released and encouraged by his college experience. Had Paul Green, perhaps unconsciously, felt frustrated and disappointed by what he received at the University? Those who knew him in his college days recognized him as a youth of unusual potential ability; whether or not he was enabled to realize that potential to the fullest can only be considered at some future time.

VII. A HOME IN CHAPEL HILL

Whatever the extent of the University's influence on Paul Green as a writer, the town of Chapel Hill has been his choice as a home ever since. Through his association with the Playmakers he met the woman who became his wife, Elizabeth Lay. The Greens' was by no means the only romance which had its

beginnings in work with the Playmakers, but it was destined to be one of the most significant. No one who has known the Greens together could fail to perceive their genuine congeniality of spirit. Paul Green could have found nowhere a companion with deeper understanding of his aims and aspirations.

Before coming to the University of North Carolina, Elizabeth Lay graduated from Saint Mary's Junior College in Raleigh and taught for a year in a country school in Northampton County. Her childhood had been spent in Concord, New Hampshire, where her father, the Reverend George Lay, an Episcopal minister, taught Greek at Saint Paul's School. He came to North Carolina as rector of Saint Mary's School. Later he was rector at Beaufort and then retired to Chapel Hill. There were five daughters and two sons in the family. Elizabeth had grown up in an atmosphere of books and of the spirited discussion of ideas. A tall, strongly built girl, she had an unusual mass of copper-colored wavy hair, a direct and friendly way of smiling, and blue green eyes with a deep light in them. During her college years she had already shown promise as a writer, and her poems and sketches appeared regularly in *The Carolina Magazine*. She took part in student government affairs, sang in the choir of the Chapel of the Cross, and found time not only to act in and to write plays, but to design and build scenery for the Playmakers.

Her engagement to Paul Green was announced in Chapel Hill in April 1922. He was then completing a year of graduate study in philosophy under the direction of Horace Williams. They were married in July in the Episcopal Church in Beaufort by Elizabeth's father.

That fall the Greens went to Cornell University, where Paul continued his study of philosophy, and Elizabeth worked as special lecturer for the New York State College of Agriculture, somewhat the same type of work which she had learned to do for the Extension Division in Chapel Hill. During the year at Cornell, Paul Green did not lose sight of the kind of writing which he wished to do. *The News and Observer* (Raleigh) printed three "Carolina Sketches" which he sent in. The second of these, a description of a Negro convict, carries the germ of a fully developed scene in *Potter's Field* and also of the powerful convict-camp chapter in *This Body the Earth*. It reveals the beginning of that horror of capital punishment which has made him oppose it publicly ever since. *The News and Observer* also published that year two realistic country poems of Green's, "After the Funeral" and "Tucker Oak."

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Even in faraway Ithaca, Paul Green's ties with Harnett County remained strong. He wrote several times to the newspaper expressing his great interest in the community "sing," which he had previously helped to organize at Buie's Creek. This was a county-wide gathering in Lillington to sing folk songs and hear old-time fiddlers. Green wrote that he hoped to see it "grow into a State and ultimately a national institution."

After a year at Cornell, the Greens returned to Chapel Hill, where he had received an appointment to the University faculty. Their first home was a big old sprawling house on Strowd's Hill, a grove at the eastern edge of the town. In those days, sisters and brothers, both Lays and Greens, Playmakers, and fellow students kept the Green home in a continual uproar. Looking back on that time, one of Green's sisters has wondered if perhaps the young couple might not have liked to be alone; but they never were, nor did it occur to her then that they might wish it. Green's need for solitude, already observable in his student days, has throughout his life run parallel with an equally strong need for drawing people about him, especially the members of his family.

His two younger sisters, Erma and Caro Mae, lived with the Greens during their years as students at the University. Caro Mae later married Phillips Russell, biographer and teacher of

creative writing, and still lives in Chapel Hill. Paul Green and Erma collaborated in writing a folk play "Fixins, the Tragedy of a Tenant Farm Women," which the Playmakers produced in 1924. Both of these sisters have the gift of writing and the vivid personalities which are part of the Green inheritance. Elizabeth's sisters, Ellen, Lucy, Virginia and Nancy, also lived with the Greens at one time or another when they were studying at the University or just visiting; her brothers, George and Henry, were frequent visitors. Not only long discussions, but music also gave them recreation; Paul enjoyed playing his fiddle with one of his sisters at the piano, and they all loved to sing.

His appointment in the University was as instructor in the Department of Philosophy. He proved an effective teacher, took his responsibility seriously, and was genuinely interested in his students. The obligations of a full-time teaching load did not, however, prevent his writing; he kept steadily at work on short stories, poems, and plays.

He also made the fullest use of the reading opportunity which the University Library offered him. Here was a chance to satisfy that hunger for books which had been his since childhood. His wide reading in fiction, drama, and philosophy greatly enriched his teaching; and he was able to convey to his students his own enthusiasm in world literature.

The Greens' first child, Paul Junior, was born in 1924. That same year they had been forced to build a house, not being able to find one to rent in Chapel Hill, which was even then crowded by the rapid expansion of the University. The new home was built in what is now known as the Glen, a hillside sloping south and east between Franklin Street and Battle Park, where no one but the enterprising Greens would at that time have thought of building. The site had the advantage of being near town and campus, and yet secluded and close to the woods. Two years after they had moved into the house in the Glen, when Paul

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Junior was still just a "knee baby," a daughter, Nancy Byrd, was born.

His growing family, and probably also the presence of the many friends drawn to the Glen by the Greens' hospitality, soon made Green feel the need for a place where he could have more seclusion. He built for himself in the woods near-by a barnlike structure which he could use as a study. The Greens' home in the Glen had become more and more a gathering place for writers and those who wanted to write or to talk about books and writing, both native Chapel Hillians and others. Among them would often be the James Boyds from their home in Southern Pines; Lamar Stringfield, the flutist and composer; Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, from The Fugitive Group; Emily Clark, editor of *The Reviewer*; and many others, first local and Southern writers, and then as Green's reputation grew, national figures. If the South experienced a literary awakening in the twenties and thirties, Chapel Hill and the Paul Green home were among its focal points.

VIII. THE REVIEWER

Teaching, writing, gardening, playing tennis, entertaining friends, spending long hours at night in literary or metaphysical discussions—surely such was a full enough way of life for a most vigorous and ambitious young man. Yet the Greens showed an amazing capacity for taking on work during these crowded days when their children were babies. Both Paul and Elizabeth had early become interested collaborators for "The Literary Lantern," a column of book reviews and book news begun in 1924 by two members of the English Department in the University, Addison Hibbard and Raymond Adams. Their expressed purpose was to relate the column especially to Southern litera-

ture. Howard Mumford Jones succeeded them as editor, and Elizabeth Green took over from him. During her editorship she continued the policy of emphasis on regional literature, a policy to which later editors have not always adhered. For a long time "The Literary Lantern" was almost a Green family enterprise. Phillips Russell, who married Caro Mae Green, followed Elizabeth as editor; then Caro Mae presided until 1945, the longest span of any of the editors.

In 1925, Paul Green accepted another responsibility and activity, the editorship of the moribund *Reviewer*. *The Reviewer* had a leading place in the literary interests and artistic creativeness in the South and in the country at large. This "little magazine," founded in Richmond in 1920, had never been able to get on a firm financial basis, although its list of contributors reads like an honor roll of the writers of the period. The Richmond editors were worn out with the effort. In December of that year Paul Green wrote to Emily Clark in Richmond that a board newly formed in Chapel Hill felt sure that they had got together enough money to see the magazine through at least five years, and offered to take it over under his editorship. The members of the board, in addition to Green, were Gerald Johnson, the biographer and editor, then in his brief two years as Professor of Journalism in Chapel Hill; Addison Hibbard, a member of the English Department and afterwards Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Northwestern University; and Nell Battle Lewis, pungent and respected columnist of *The News and Observer*.

Since *The Reviewer* had published Green's play, "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin," in April 1924, before his first book appeared, he had some reason to feel kindly toward the magazine. When *The Reviewer* accepted this play, Green wrote Miss Clark, "I'm just beginning this writing business, stumbling, sweating, blindly at times, pushing on—lost in a greater quandary than poor Blue-Gum Ed in this play."

In the January 1925 issue of *The Reviewer*, the first under the new management, there appeared "A Plain Statement about Southern Literature," by "P. E. G." In it the new editor protested against the insincerity and obvious falseness of earlier Southern Literature, as exhibited, for instance, in such a "literary morgue" as *The Library of Southern Literature*.

> I am not declaring [he wrote] for a complete renunciation of the past in Southern letters, but rather for a truer and fresher interpretation of our environment and our relations to that environment; for a rejuvenation of our spiritual instincts so long dead to curiosity and wonder; for a food to feed upon different from the sweetened wind and other cotton-candy stuff dished out by our party leaders and preachers and windy gullibles . . . that loud ranting note . . . the usual Southern rhetoric and spectacular hyperbole [bestowed upon] earth-departing spinsters, shave-tail poets, ninety-days wonders, crossroads philosophers, minute Alfred Tennysons, and nostalgic, whimpering Poes.

This statement not only set the tone of *The Reviewer*, but is significant as a revelation of Green's own standards and the type of writing which he wished to avoid. His revolt against the facile sentimentality of Southern literature may help to account for his inability to set free completely the deepest poetry within him.

The poor paper and print of the issues for that year indicate *The Reviewer's* struggle for survival. On August 9, 1925 "The Literary Lantern" recorded:

> The current number of *The Reviewer* is out, a bit late, 'tis true, and one copy at least horribly put together and printed. The magazine has been having about the usual vicissitudes of new publications.

In short, the magazine's career in Chapel Hill was a repetition of what it had been in Richmond: distinction without money. By the end of 1925 Green had begun to feel the strain of the unrelenting deadline, the financial anxiety, the everlasting demands which interrupted and drained his creative energies. The board met in November and admitted it was impossible to continue publication.

In the course of its all too brief career, *The Reviewer* had been a valiant and significant venture. The literary climate of the South was changing, and the little magazine had been one of the most sensitive of wind-and-temperature indicators.

IX. FOLK PLAYS

The busy years of Paul Green's teaching and his editorship of *The Reviewer* were fruitful in writing too. From the full storehouse of his childhood memories, he drew most of the material for his earlier works.

One of the folk plays which Green had written as a student, but which had not been produced by the Playmakers, may well be taken, as Barrett Clark suggests, as "a sort of prologue to what he had determined to make his life work, the story to be gradually written down in stories, novels, plays, of my home folks, black and white!" The play is "White Dresses," which Clark considers the "first of his plays to show unmistakable signs of genius." This brief and harshly realistic episode of the love of a Negro girl for a white boy and of her utter defeat by the boy's father is set forth in sharp sincerity. Archibald Henderson has recorded the intense argument which occurred in Chapel Hill in 1921 over whether or not the Playmakers be allowed to produce a play with such a theme. The Chapel Hill decision was against it, and the Playmakers had to omit it from their bill. B. R. Lewis, however, selected "White Dresses" for his collection of *Contemporary One-Act Plays*, where Paul Green appeared in the goodly company of Barrie, Lady Gregory, Chekhov, Sudermann, and Strindberg. Another play of about the same time, "The Lord's Will," stirred up so many protests in Burlington, North Carolina, when the Playmakers first acted it there, that they decided to drop it from their repertory. Already in these first years of writing Green

had given indication of his ability to stir up controversy, of his boldness in attacking social wrongs, and his deep concern for the humiliated and dispossessed.

The clear purpose which he expressed in regard to his life work is one to which he has adhered ever since, unless the Hollywood years and the historical dramas are to be considered deviations. He once wrote: "From its beginning three hundred years ago, until the present, North Carolina has made no lasting contribution to the art of the world. Several million people have lived and died here, and no one has set himself aside in high-minded and intelligent devotion to record a single one of these lives . . . ." The phrase "intelligent devotion" precisely describes how he approached his task of interpreting the lives of the country people with whom he had grown up.

Not only was Paul Green's purpose clear from the start, but his talent was quickly recognized and encouraged. He did not have to face the disappointments and long frustrations which many writers suffer. From his student days on, Paul Green was hailed, first by his teachers, later by such critics as Howard Mumford Jones and Barrett Clark, as a man of exceptional talent. This does not imply that everything had been easy for him; he was an extremely hard worker, and a sensitive and complex personality who always met conflicts head-on. He possessed to a high degree the artist's everlasting dissatisfaction with his own work. In speaking of *The Common Glory*, when he was sweating over shaping and completing it, he sighed and added, "But then I've never really finished *The Lost Colony* . . . . I still want to rewrite it." This was said at a time when he had achieved enough acclaim to make him complacent. His defeats have come from within, from the failure that is part of the tragic paradox of the genuine artist: no matter how great the poet's facility (and Green's is considerable), words can never quite catch within their net the shining dream entire and whole. The actuality in print is always less than the imagined design.

Although Green's plays and stories seldom carry specific dates of action, they are almost invariably placed in the latter years of the nineteenth or the first decade of the twentieth century in rural eastern North Carolina, the period and locale of his boyhood and his most vivid memories. Even in his earlier plays he began to explore and shape that "Little Bethel" neighborhood, which has become more and more specific in his imagination and which follows pretty clearly the Cape Fear Valley. The time and locale are important for an understanding of his plays. The economic and social conditions pictured in them, both in the way of living of the sharecropper and the Negro, have by now changed somewhat for the better. Perhaps Abraham McCranie, of *In Abraham's Bosom*, could get an education now at Shaw University in Raleigh or at North Carolina College in Durham, and then fulfill his ambition to teach his people. Perhaps Etta and Hardy Gilchrist of *The Field God* could find some help for their complex troubles in a less isolated and bigoted community. The farms and villages of *Shroud My Body Down, This Body the Earth, Tread the Green Grass*, and most of the others, were remote from cities; automobiles were still scarce, there were no radios, roads were unpaved and sometimes impassable, country schools were few and poorly taught, and the influence of the churches tended to swing between the extremes of austerity and the hysterical emotionalism of revivals.

"The Last of the Lowries," written while Green was still a student, had utilized the romantic story of the Croatan outlaws, who lived in a near-by county and whose legend must have been long familiar to him. In the other plays and stories written at this time, his characters are either the Negroes or white farmers and sharecroppers of the Cape Fear region. "The Hot Iron," "The End of the Row," "The Prayer Meeting," "Old Wash Lucas," and "Your Fiery Furnace" were first published in *Poet Lore* during 1923 and 1924. The young dramatist had won esteem,

though very little money. "Your Fiery Furnace" later became the third act of *In Abraham's Bosom*. Six one-act plays of Negro life were collected in 1926 into the volume *Lonesome Road*. "The Lord's Will," called "a tragedy of a country preacher," is one of the earlier expressions of the author's interest in the religious conflicts of ingrown communities. In these first plays are to be found in germ most of the themes which have been developed more roundly in later works, even essentially in the historical dramas: the bitter fate of the Negro, the Negro's ambition to rise, his frustrations, the white man's injustice and blind cruelty, love between Negro and white, the angry resentments bred by the pressures of small neighborhoods, the defeated aspirations of the tenant farmer, the tragedies caused by intense yet ignorant religious feeling, the decay of old families in the Old South. In these first plays Green forged the language which is especially his: the use of the local specific word, the speech cadences of Negroes and unlettered white, the echoes of hymns, prayers and sermons, Biblical phraseology, the moving rhythms, the sudden poetry. The plays of Green's 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, for example, 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, as he does in other instances, against the conventional limitations of the theatre, attempting to conjure up in a paragraph or two a whole locality, an entire and complex social climate.

One of the most popular of Green's short plays of Negro life, "The No 'Count Boy," introduced a new strain in his work, that of fantasy. Here again the poet in him sought expression. "The

No 'Count Boy" is an exquisitely rounded unit, too bubble-light to touch with any heavy finger of parable. This story of a seventeen-year-old Negro girl, her hard-working practical betrothed, and the wandering dreamy boy who almost enchants her with his tunes and tall tales, carries a suggestion of the yearning of all youth for faraway places, for escape from the commonplace. It proved very successful on the stage and is a favorite in the repertory of the Carolina Playmakers. "The No 'Count Boy" was first produced by the Studio Players at the Little Theatre in Chicago in the winter of 1924, and later at the Dallas Little Theatre. In the spring of 1925 the Dallas group brought the play to New York, where it won the Belasco Cup in the National Little Theatre Tournament. This prize was one of the first instances of national recognition of Paul Green's talent.

The critics were already interested in Paul Green, notably Barrett Clark. In his preface to *Lonesome Road*, published the following year, Clark wrote an estimate of Green's work to date:

> I feel that his greatest gifts are his instinctive talent for seizing upon a dramatic situation, his poetic imagination, and his intuitive knowledge of character. I believe that poetic imagination is what our theatre stands most in need of. We have skilled technicians a-plenty, and in O'Neill a great artist of many aspects. But as yet we have no genuine folk dramatist besides Paul Green. If he were at this moment to cease writing he would be entitled to a place of honor in the development of the American drama. But he is only beginning. Was any beginner ever better equipped?

Barrett Clark has called Green's "The Prayer Meeting" the "first successful attempt to introduce into our theatre the full-blooded Negro, the healthy animal, neither a downright villain nor a dreamy Uncle Tom sentimentalist."

Paul Green's interest in the Negro is undoubtedly related to a general quickening of appreciation of Negro art and Negro life, but his concern goes much deeper than any trend or literary fad; it had been aroused in early childhood, in a region quite remote

from the ripples of literary fashion. He likes Negroes as people, likes their music, their humor, their speech, their spontaneous poetry, and he feels deeply the injustice which they have suffered. His parallel concern for the plight of the white tenant farmer strengthens the conviction that his sympathy for the Negro is rooted in his distress over all mistreated people; it is but one facet in his larger realization of man's inhumanity to man. He was of course encouraged by Koch's teaching to turn to his own early experience for the materials of drama, and there he was confronted with two impressive instances of that inhumanity: the fate of the Negro and of the tenant farmer, to whose tragedies his sense of justice as well as his sense of drama responded.

Green's Negroes are fully developed and comprehended individuals. He writes of them from within, not as the white man sees them, but as they aspire and love and crack jokes and sing, struggle and suffer, eat and drink and hate and fear and die. He knows how to catch the poetry and the humor of their speech, the pathos and the comedy and the searing tragedy of their lives.

His sympathetic portrayal of Negro character has contributed toward that greatly to be desired increase of understanding between the races which is apparent in the South. He has also in many practical ways consistently proved himself a friend of the Negroes in his own town, employing them at generous wages, lending them money, going on notes and bail for them, giving his influence and prestige to any undertaking for their advancement, and in all his dealings living up to the spirit of his convictions. Although he has frequently been called by that old unfair Southern tag based on prejudice, "nigger-lover," he has not been a blind or even always an enthusiastic admirer of the race. Occasionally in despair over the shoddy performance of some Negro to whom he has given work, he shakes his head sadly and calls them "sorry, shiftless, no 'count"—slave words. That is, he sees them not as martyrs but as human beings, with the short-comings

of human nature tangled with those imposed upon them by social injustice. This clarity is especially apparent in *In Abraham's Bosom,* where the aspirations of Abraham are defeated by his own people.

X. PULITZER PRIZE-WINNER

In the first six years after graduation from college, Paul Green had published some twenty-one plays. Two collections of his plays, under the titles *The Lord's Will* and *Lonesome Road,* had appeared in print. Green spent the summer of 1926 at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, and during this period of freedom from classroom routine wrote steadily. DuBose and Dorothy Heyward were also at Peterboro that summer, working on the dramatization of *Porgy.*

Before going to Peterboro, Green had finished the three-act version of *In Abraham's Bosom.* This play had its origin in a one-act play of the same name, first published in *Lonesome Road,* which became the first act of the fully developed drama. Although this first act is a unit in itself, it contains the seed of the subsequent acts; the reader wants to hear the rest of Abraham's story and has a foreboding of his tragedy. The manuscript went the rounds of the commercial producers, all of whom rejected it. At last the Provincetown Players accepted it, thus writing another chapter in the long story of the contribution of little theatres and art theatres to the history of drama in this country. A company of Negro actors, under the direction of Jasper Deeter, first produced *In Abraham's Bosom* at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village. The play ran from December 30, 1926, to March 5, 1927, drawing increasingly larger audiences as the news of its excellence circulated through Manhattan. It finally moved uptown to the Garrick Theatre. The author himself had not expected it

to do so well, and expressed surprise at the encouraging reviews during the run of more than two months.

The author has described his play in the subtitle as "The Biography of a Negro in Seven Scenes." The story of Abraham McCranie is one that Green was to retell in other forms, for the theme greatly appealed to him; basically, it is a tragedy of aspiration and defeat. The fact that the characters are Negroes, and the locale the author's familiar turpentine forests and small-town slums of North Carolina, does not detract from, but rather strengthens, the universality of the theme. Abraham McCranie, a mulatto farmer, has an ambition to teach school, in order to help other members of his race to improve themselves by education. His defeat comes from baffling forces, his own ignorance, the slothfulness of his race, the hatred of his son, the weariness of his loyal wife; finally, driven to bitter half-mad desperation, when he feels fate closing in on him, he strikes out in a frenzy and kills. The scenes have the rough texture of reality, both those in the pine woods of the first act, and those in wretched cabins and slum rooms. The speech is pungent, tingling, alive with poetic flashes and cadences. These Negroes are individuals; never romanticized, they appear in all their complexities of yearning and weakness, vice and generosity, weariness and anger and bewilderment. In one aspect, the play 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 plea is reduced to its simplest terms. "Give a nigger a book and des well shoot him," says one of the characters in the first act; this summarizes the wry and tortured action of the play.

In May 1927 *In Abraham's Bosom* received the Pulitzer Award for drama. There was hearty rejoicing in the house in the Glen. For Paul Green the honor somewhat cushioned his disappointment over the closing of the play; for contrary to his earlier disavowals, the good reviews had led him to hope that it would run

longer. For brothers and sisters, friends and townspeople, it was an occasion of prideful joy. Even larger areas began to feel complacent at having borne, however unwittingly, a thus-crowned author in their midst. This was the first time the prize in drama had come South. Hatcher Hughes, a graduate of the University of North Carolina and also a former member of the faculty there, had won it in 1924 with *Hell-bent fer Heaven*, but at the time he was teaching at Columbia University.

The critics did not unanimously share the enthusiasm of Green's friends and admirers over the award. Barrett Clark surmised that some of them who expressed displeasure had not taken the trouble to go downtown to the Provincetown Theatre to see the production. Brooks Atkinson in *The New York Times* said of the decision, "The judges this year had the courage of discernment, and they have directed attention to Mr. Green's talents at a time when the larger public still knows nothing about him," and then pointed out how well *In Abraham's Bosom* fulfilled the terms set forth for the prize:

> For the original American play performed in New York which shall best represent the educational power of the stage in raising the standard of good morals, good taste and good manners.

Atkinson went on to deplore the timidity of this wording, wishing that

> it sang of truth and beauty rather than of education. For in recalling the passionate eloquence of Mr. Geen's drama we think of its sincerity, its strength and its understanding more naturally than we remember its good behavior.

Other plays of that year which were considered for the Pulitzer Prize were *Broadway* by Philip Dunning, *Saturday's Children* by Maxwell Anderson, *The Silver Cord* by Sidney Howard, *The Barker* by Kenyon Nicholson, and *Daisy Mayme* by George Kelly, all of which had longer runs and more box-office success than *In Abraham's Bosom*. The season on Broadway had been by no means a dull one. Yet the award went to a play which was no great popular success, written by an obscure young playwright, produced by a Negro company in an out-of-the-way theatre.

After the award, the play was revived in May. Green did not like this attempt to cash in on the Pulitzer publicity, and expressed forceful disapproval in a telegram:

> I wish to protest against it absolutely. Have thought of arguments against my attitude but still I feel that this capitalizing of a windfall is illegitimate and vulgar. Let *Abraham* rest with some dignity in his grave; there is a damnable cheapness about this sudden bestirring over the Pulitzer soup (the publicity, that is, not the prize itself). I will have nothing to do with it and wish that you would do what you can to stop the movement. . . .

With his passion for revision and his dissatisfaction over his own work, Green had become aware by that time of all the weaknesses of the play and had no wish to see it put on again. But regardless of his veto, the play was reopened on May 8, 1927, for two weeks only. In the fall the Provincetown Players revived it again for a brief run and later sent it on the road.

XI. THE FIELD GOD

At the same time that the manuscript of *In Abraham's Bosom* was being rejected by various publishers, *The Field God*, his second full-length play, had followed the same course. It was finally tried out in Brooklyn in April 1927 and had short runs in New York at the Greenwich Theatre and at the Cort. Robert McBride published it along with *In Abraham's Bosom* in 1927.

The central figure of *The Field God* is Hardy Gilchrist, a successful white farmer, a strong defiant man who refuses to bend to religion in accordance with the demands of his sickly wife and pious neighbors. In his self-sufficiency he admits no need of help.

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The drama unfolds his punishment for a passionate love, punishment which comes partly from accident, partly from his unjustly treated tenants, partly from his narrowly pietistic neighbors. In spite of long torture, Hardy at the end still defies God.

Many strains reminiscent of Green's boyhood days are here: the realistic scene of hog-killing, the power of the church in an isolated community, the similar power of neighborhood gossip, the cringing hatred of tenants toward the owner. Perhaps in the back of his mind lingered that old story of his grandfather, another gay and proud personality like Hardy Gilchrist, who was said to have come into conflict with the local church. Although the love of Hardy and Rhoda is a credible one, and although the conflict of wills sustains interest throughout, there occurs in this play more than a trace of that obscurity which confused later audiences in, for instance, *Shroud My Body Down*. The reader fails to be sure of what the author offers him. Is earthly love to be chosen in defiance of the observances of conventional religion? Shall the strong man resist the forces of superstition? Are the restraints of a bigoted church and community a denial of life itself? Or is the author interested simply in presenting a picture of the cruelty and sadism which thrive on prejudice? It is Paul Green, the poet and mystic, who is writing here of the naturally religious man who has lost for a while beliefs which are deeply ingrained in him. The drama of the conflict between man and God strongly attracted Green as a writer, perhaps because he had not fully resolved that conflict within himself.

When *The Field God* opened in Chicago in 1930, one enthusiastic critic said. "If *In Abraham's Bosom*, which Mr. Green also wrote, was worth a Pulitzer Prize, *The Field God* ought to have two." Paul Green's colleague, Addison Hibbard, writing in "The Literary Lantern" found that it marked a distinct advance in Green's development.

Walter Pritchard Eaton, in *The New York Times*, February

19, 1928, commented on the poetry and the local significance of Green's writing as revealed in these two long plays:

> It is too early yet to make predictions about Paul Green, the young instructor at the University of North Carolina, who learned to write vivid one-act plays in Professor Koch's courses there, and who last Winter showed New York his two long plays, "The Field God" and "In Abraham's Bosom." He unquestionably possesses dramatic talent of a high order, if as yet moving somewhat stiffly in the longer form. He also possesses, like O'Neill, a strong vein of poetry which transmutes the realism of his prose into rhythm and envelopes his tragedies with an ennobling beauty. . . . He writes of the life of his native North Carolina; he demonstrates that out of the amateur and academic theatre of his state can come a genuine and powerful expression of the local life. His plays may well become weapons for the liberalizing of the lives of his people.

Part II

". . . this may involve some fusion of music and even the dance as an intersifying adjunct to drama, and perhaps a reconception of the uses of space on the stage. . . ."

XII. GERMANY AND ENGLAND

In 1928 Paul Green received a Guggenheim fellowship for a year abroad to study the European theatre. He decided to go to Germany because he felt the theatre there was venturing into experimental fields. He and Elizabeth both wished to avoid American tourists and to live close to the people, in order to learn to know them and to speak the language. For these reasons they took a flat in one of the poorer sections of Berlin, not far from the Tempelhofer Airport. Green immediately began a conscientious study of German grammar, and his wife had daily practical experience in using the language in marketing and talking to the scrubwomen who came in to help with the cleaning. The flat was near a small park where the children, accustomed to the woods of Chapel Hill, could have some outdoor play; and soon both little Paul and Nancy Byrd were enrolled in a kindergarten run by Sisters of a Lutheran order.

Keeping house in a foreign country with two small children is not an easy task under any circumstances, and that winter proved an extremely difficult one for the Greens. For one thing, it was the coldest winter that Europe had known in seventy-five years, remembered as the winter when the canals in Venice froze. Berlin was bitterly cold, and the only heat in the Greens' flat came from a porcelain stove. Later they moved to a house in the suburb of Dahlem, where they were much more comfortable. Here they had a garden, and the children could be outdoors more. They also acquired a nurse and household helper, Erna Lamprecht, who became a loyal friend and accompanied them to England and later to Chapel Hill, where she remained for eighteen months. The Greens kept in touch with her; and after the end of World War II she wrote them that as the American soldiers came into Berlin she scanned their faces, searching "for my enemy, who is just little Paulie." In 1949 the Greens succeeded in bringing Erna to

this country and established her and her family on a farm in Orange County.

In spite of household difficulties, Paul and Elizabeth Green managed to do what they had come to Berlin for; they went constantly to the theatre, seeing all kinds of plays from the most frivolous of comedies and light opera to the most serious and thought-provoking experimental plays. They saw such great German actors of the period as Moissi and Werner Kraus. They met Kurt Weill, who later came to Chapel Hill. They went to many movies, both German and Russian. They made friends with Julius Bab, Professor of Drama in the University of Berlin, and through him became interested in the work of the Volkstheatre. Frau Bab, who had been educated in England, translated *In Abraham's Bosom* into German; it was published in Berlin in 1929.

With his usual diffidence, Paul Green presented few of the letters of introduction to prominent German writers and theatre people which had been given to him before he left America. He felt handicapped by his lack of facility with the language and somewhat shy about meeting the great and near-great. The *Berliner Zeitung* sent an artist to do a cartoon of him, and an article about him appeared in the newspaper, but he did not care to trade on the publicity which might have been his as a Pulitzer prize-winner.

Nonetheless, he was stimulated and enriched by his experiences in Germany. His enjoyment was vividly expressed in letters to his friend, Proff Koch. At first the German theatre disappointed him. "Most of what I'd seen of the Reinhardt shows struck me cold," he wrote. But then he discovered the Moscow Jewish Theatre, directed by Alexis Granowsky. He wrote:

> Well, here is the most astonishing folk theatre I've ever met! Marvellous to me. Grotesque and human, puppet-like, musicalized, stylized, unreal and other-worldly. I felt I must tell you about it! The plays are done in Yiddish, but the strange tongue but adds to its exotic charm. For once I have been satisfied with the conventions of the stage. Here it is a child's theatre, too—few properties, but all attention on make-up, ballet movements, mass formations, color, lighting—all submerged in and generating a strange dream-likeness, the artless (and yet fibered pattern) theatre of play, of the folk. During the last month I've wished many a time that you could see what Granowsky has done and tell me what you thought of it. You might not agree. But I do know that you would agree that something as new and full of "fine excess" could be done with the folk songs and customs in North Carolina. We must do that Virginia Dare sort of lyrical song-drama some of these days. And what we could do with the mountain ballads! I've always been interested in the relation of music and drama, and have always felt that opera was not the solution. Granowsky has reached a sort of solution which has given its own art forth, and it satisfied me.

Much of this letter is important for an understanding of Green's later work. Already, in 1928, he was brooding over "that Virginia Dare sort of lyrical song-drama," the germ of *The Lost Colony;* he was thinking of ways to bring together music and drama in a new non-operatic but harmonious blend. This experiment accounts for the technique of *Tread the Green Grass, Shroud My Body Down, The Enchanted Maze, Johnny Johnson,* and *Roll, Sweet Chariot,* and comes to full flower in the "symphonic dramas."

At the end of the first year Paul Green's Guggenheim fellowship was extended for another six months. In June 1929 the family went to England. They found a comfortable flat at 72 Temple Fortune Lane. In London as in Berlin, Green was hesitant about following up the introductions which had been given him. He had a ready-made friend there, Mrs. Frank Vernon, an American who had lived for a long time in London. She had become interested in some of Green's early plays, and had translated one of the most macabre of these, "In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin," for the Grand Guignol Theatre in Paris, where it had been produced. Soon after the Greens arrived in London, Mrs. Vernon gave a party for them, at which they met various literary notables, among them Rebecca West. But the acquaintances initiated there did not de-

velop into any significant associations. Green preferred to go his somewhat solitary way, spending much time at the theatre.

For the most part, he got no such stimulation out of the English theatre as he found in the Moscow Art Theatre. In October 1929 he wrote to Koch:

> The theatre here is, as usual, rather tame. No combining of forces, every manager on his own—clubs, subscription theatres, halls, carrying on individually, and with little inspiration or comprehension so far as one can see. . . . These producers won't organize, go on feeding rough recognizable pigs soft dove food. For the English theatre public is about like that of America—lively, healthy as a pig, and anxious for good trough feed as well as walking in the parlor, and like all publics, easily fooled by those whom they think superior. They will come running time without end to the rattle of an empty basket, hoping for corn and never getting it, and what they need of course is not sound and wind but something else. Maybe it will be provided. . . . Anyhow, I would say that a good organization somewhat like the American Theatre Guild is the only thing that will pull the present English drama out of its riveted coffin.

While in London he became interested in the work of the Arts League of Service, a travelling group of actors who were also their own stage hands and producers, very much in the manner of the Carolina Playmakers. "This is something alive," he wrote, "but it's rather small to play much part in the public's likes and dislikes."

St. John Irvine had given Green a note to George Bernard Shaw, one introduction which he finally presented. In a letter to Koch he described that visit:

> Shaw did about 99% of the talking . . . he asked several questions about Chapel Hill, his friend Archibald Henderson, life in the South, O'Neill, and so on. Then he began on philosophy and talked for half an hour by the clock without my saying a word, or wanting to, for that matter. He reviewed the old dispensation—as he called it—before Darwin, the coming of the natural outlook, ending with the advent of Einstein on the scene. Then he talked about Einstein, whom he greatly admires, told one or two anecdotes of their acquaintance, and then swung around to the present-day scene of thought in England—

> G.B.S., Haldane, Bertrand Russell, and others. Half the time he was jollying and half the time serious, but always with a flow of words—never hesitating, never too involved—rushing on with bits of anecdotes, etc.
>
> Finally I asked some questions which led around to the drama—by way of modern religious feeling for science, especially in physics and astronomy, which so many dramatists and theatre artists are trying to use on the stage. He is keenly alive to all sorts of possibilities and thinks, unlike most Englishmen I've met, that the talkies have a tremendous future. Then followed lots of incidents about his speaking for the talkies, experience in writing plays, etc., etc. From his talk at this point I had a feeling that he had in mind a grandiose dramatic work which would make use of some modern religio-scientific idea, calling for the most stage devices in production of it. I didn't ask him, for it was none of my business, and he didn't tell me outright, but such was my feeling about it, my impression. Finally I rose to go, but he moved his hand and said he'd spare another five minutes. He began again and talked for another fifteen minutes with hardly a pause. Well, I'll tell you in detail when I get back about our conversation—the many, many things he said or suggested, and I believe that he is the *youngest man in Europe* and *about* the only remaining hope for the English drama of the present period—still the Shaw drama, of course.

Far more memorable for Paul Green personally and of greater significance in his work than his visit to Shaw, was his visit to the Wessex of Thomas Hardy. He had always considered Hardy one of the greatest of novelists; Hardy's deep feeling for the country, for the locality, his understanding of the hearts of simple folk, and the poetry inherent in all of his writing had a very direct appeal for the interpreter of eastern North Carolina. He made a detailed record of it in a typewritten manuscript called "Notes on a Trip to Hardy's Country," which is now in the Library of the University of North Carolina. Green had come to Dorchester with a letter of introduction to Mrs. Hardy in his pocket. On the first day of his stay he walked toward Max Gate and looked at the entrance but "decided not to present it." Another day he got up his courage and went in to have tea with Mrs. Hardy, in her Victorian sitting room embellished with plush and bric-a-brac and many pictures. He had carried out his dream of visiting the coun-

try which Hardy had made so distinctively his, as Green himself was to make the Little Bethel region his own literary homeland.

XIII. THE GLEN AGAIN

On returning to Chapel Hill, Green resumed his position on the faculty of the University as an assistant professor of philosophy. A student of his during that period has left an impression of the quality of his teaching:

> His teaching is not pedantic, not didactic, not conventional, not scholarly, not academic; it is not any of those things which college and university students wearily take for granted in their professors. His teaching is persuasive as all art is persuasive. . . . Not only is his subject matter unacademic; his manner is completely so. No one has ever seen him standing on one of those nice definitely bounded teaching rostrums, and nobody ever will. He stands sometimes, but most often he sits, not behind the desk, but informally upon it. With brooding intensity he talks.
>
> Propping his chin in his hand, he reflects on the misery of the poor white tenants in eastern North Carolina, or on the industrial system and mechanical living. And he is quite likely to say with fervor which is not philosophical but lyrical: "Yeah. That's no help for us." And always his thinking evolves from a definite image, a particular scene such as a Negro hoeing corn, a particular color and feeling. He evokes these as he does in his plays.

The house in the Glen became more than ever a gathering place for people with literary and musical interests. These parties were stimulated somewhat by the presence of Wilbur Daniel Steele, the short story writer, who with his wife and two small boys came to Chapel Hill in 1930. This was for Steele a return to his native state, since he had been born in Greensboro; but he had lived out of North Carolina most of his life, and his work has very little local or regional flavor. The Steeles rented the big white house on East Franklin Street which Greenlaw had built.

This house is just across from the Glen, and the Steeles and Greens became congenial friends as well as neighbors.

There was often music and dancing at the house in the Glen. At one time Green organized a quartet made up of E. E. Ericson, William Olsen, Phillips Russell, and himself; they met weekly at his house, and he proved himself a most meticulous director of part-singing, insisting that they take it seriously and sing well. On other evenings, ascetic-looking James Boyd of Southern Pines would do a lively breakdown, or Jonathan Daniels of Raleigh weave his way through a Virginia reel.

It was during the early thirties that Paul Green became for a brief time involved in another venture in lauching a "little magazine." *Contempo,* founded in 1931 by by Milton Abernethy and Anthony J. Buttitta of Chapel Hill, ran a brief, brilliant course and contributed to the excitement of the life in the village. Green became a contributing editor in 1931-32, along with Louis Adamic, Barrett Clark, Langston Hughes, Ezra Pound, and Lewis Mumford. In February 1932 Green was succeeded on the editorial board by William Faulkner.

XIV. THE HOUSE OF CONNELLY

Paul Green's next success in the theatre, *The House of Connelly,* was produced in New York by the Group Theatre at the Martin Beck in October 1931. The Theatre Guild had bought an option on *The House of Connelly* soon after Green won the Pulitzer Prize, held it two years, and then turned it over to the Experimental Group. The production was an immediate success. At the first performance, the actors had to respond to fifteen curtain calls. The bashful and nervous author, who had watched the play from a seat high in the gallery, refused to come down for a curtain speech.

The House of Connelly is in a sense a deviation from Green's other work to this date, since it deals with an outmoded, impoverished self-styled aristocracy, rather than with simple country folk. In this play Green has his say about that legend which every Southern writer of his generation had either to face or to turn away from: that dream, or delusion, of lost grandeur, a stubborn old dream which dies hard. Thomas Wolfe attempted it unsuccessfully in his play *Mannerhouse*. It has been kept alive, at least in part, by the survival of the old houses that bear witness to a more spacious way of life whose economic props were swept out by war and change. The action of *The House of Connelly* takes place in such a mansion at about the turn of the century; that is, at a period close enough to the Civil War for its memories to be poignant, and far enough away for the whole pre-war way of life to be completely outdated. The play can be understood only with an awareness of the period.

The story is a simple one: Will, the son of landowners who have lived too long on past splendors and failed to accept the realities of a changed world, is brought to his senses by his love for Patsy Tate, daughter of a tenant, who wakes him from his sterile dream of the past to meet the responsibility of the farm. His awakening comes only after the suicide of an uncle, the death of his domineering mother, and the departure of his "fine lady" sisters; his past is irrevocably destroyed. The atmosphere, the climate of false pride, of exaltation of family, the conflict between these ideas and the actual needs of living in a practical world, are skillfully and deftly conveyed. The two huge Negro women, Big Sue and Big Sis, who serve as a Greek chorus or commentary to the drama, are coarse figures of earth, in sharp counterpoint to the mincings and posturings of the Connelly women. The somber characterization of Tate, and Patsy herself, gay and healthy with a strong feeling for the land, typify Green's interest in the tenant farmer's hopes and frustrations. But the main theme

is the tragedy, which in essence veers close to the ridiculous, of the South's nostalgia for lost magnificence, a magnificence considerably exaggerated by memory. In the play Uncle Bob remarks that the family have lived in the house one hundred and fifty years, which means that it must have been built about the middle of the eighteenth century.

It is possible that this play is written less from deep memory and experience than Green's others; it has somewhat less immediacy, somewhat more literary flavor than the others. In no play is his sense of theatre surer; in none is he less experimental and adventurous.

XV. FIRST SYMPHONIC DRAMAS

There is perhaps no great significance in the fact that almost all of Paul Green's contributions to college publications during his student days were poems. Many young writers naturally turn first to poetry. But a familiarity with the whole of his work to date convinces one more and more that here is a poet who is still at times groping toward his fullest expression. He has never been satisfied with conventional dramatic formulae, has always been irked by rules, and has refused to trim his plays to meet the exigencies of sets and props. In many of his plays the lyrics, the poetry, carry the real significance, the heart of what he wants to say. Such songs as Tapley's in *Shroud My Body Down* blend the reality and the beauty of his childhood experience:

> Deep to the bud and clean to the little leaf
> Set your plants if you want 'em to live.
> But never clod the little leaf
> For the little leaf is the mouth. . . .
>
> I've been out at three in the evening
> The dew was still in the little bud,

And the humming birds all green and gold
Would be drinking from 'em since the mid of day. . . .

In his novels and short stories, poetry is implicit in his evocations of the Carolina country and of the moods of his people. Green, the poet, shaped into Green, the playwright, presents a problem that cannot at the present time be unriddled. Thomas Wolfe, like Green, profoundly influenced by Koch and the Playmakers, finally gave up the struggle to confine his colossal torrents of words within the limits of the theatre. Paul Green has refused to give up the effort, but has sought instead to enlarge those limits.

This need for poetic expression, coupled with his need for music, probably inclined him toward the original form of the plays which he has called symphonic dramas. In these, through the use of poetry and music, he has sought to suggest more of the human subconscious, the overtones and nuances of experience, than can readily be put into words.

Sunk into my earliest remembrance as a child [he wrote] were the folk-dance, folk-song, the ballad, the mammy lullaby, the instrument—the fiddle, the banjo, the harmonica, the knocking bones, and country church organ. They were as native and integral to the life of the people among whom I lived as the Bible, the hymnbook, the hoe, the rake, the plough, the axe and blade which fitted so snugly to their heart and hand. When finally at the assumed age of accountability I tried to write plays and see them set upon the local stage, these musical expressions of voice and instrument kept pushing themselves up in humps and rivulets of song as a clamorous part of the material with which I had to deal. There was no escaping them. Everywhere and like the subterranean energy of a mole they left their tracery in my tended plans.

And he still remembered what Alexis Granowsky, of the Moscow Jewish Theatre, had said to him in Berlin:

I think the musical drama or musical play offers greater opportunity than any other. . . . For instance, the use of musicalized pantomine, speech, and facial expression can liberate all those imaginative overtones of human psychology which straight realism can never touch. Also by the use of music all sorts of conventions and needs which otherwise might obstruct and disintegrate a production to nothingness can be got around—short cuts in scenery, properties, and staging methods can be obtained. Further, it is easier to go straight to the heart of your story, to reach its inner expressive symbolism, and most vital meaning.

That is the kind of music-drama toward which Green steadily worked. Because he lacked formal musical training, he had not been able to compose music for his plays or even to arrange it. In 1930, when Lamar Springfield came to live in Chapel Hill, Green found in him a trained and highly endowed collaborator who could interpret his themes in terms of music.

He had first met Stringfield in France, where the latter played the flute in the band of the 105th Engineers; in fact, Green remembers that the first time he saw him, Stringfield was briefly in the guardhouse for some clash between artistic temperament and military authority. By the time he came to Chapel Hill, the young flutist and composer had already distinguished himself. In 1928 he had 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 the work of Paul Green, the Carolina Playmakers, Howard Odum, and Guy Johnson. Stringfield was bubbling over with plans and ideas for collecting and preserving folk songs, for an institute of folk music, and most especially for a state symphony —ideas which were later to assume definite and permanent form.

The first of Green's plays for which Lamar Stringfield wrote the score was *Tread the Green Grass*. In this, the music is not "incidental," but conceived of by the author as a closely interwoven part of the play itself, taking up and carrying on the meaning beyond those limits where words must always stop. Barrett Clark found that *Tread the Green Grass* "marks an important point in this playwright's artistic development." It was not, however, a new point. A glance back over the plays written prior to this reveal that almost all of them contain lyrics, old songs,

snatches of spirituals, hymns, dance tunes, music heard off stage. Music has been to him neither an ornament nor an extra, but one more basic tool of expression. In his usage, "symphonic drama" means neither opera nor a play with musical accompaniment, but an artistic unit in which music is much more closely integrated with words and action than in either of these forms.

The demands of *Tread the Green Grass* for extraordinary resources of lighting, dancing, acting, music and scenery, frightened professional theatre managers. The play was first produced in July 1932 by a non-commercial group, the Department of Drama at the University of Iowa. Both Green and Stringfield went to Iowa for the opening night, and *The New York Times* sent Barrett Clark to review it. Of the first night Clark wrote that the production was "a harmonious whole that held a large audience more than two hours in a hall where the temperature never fell below 100 degrees."

The author describes *Tread the Green Grass* as "a folk fantasy with music and dumb show." In his curtain speech in Iowa he spoke of it disarmingly as "just a little fairy tale." But its implications are far from simple; it attempts to reveal, through poetry, music and drama, the conflicts in an adolescent girl between the imaginative longings stirred by her newly awakened senses and the rigid beliefs and practices of religious morality in which she has been brought up. The drama moves on two planes, one the realistic countryside of Green's other plays, the second a plane of fantasy in which Tina's dreams and fears of witches and gnomes, of sin and hell-fire, are projected on the stage by music, dance, and pantomime. Tina is a "sister" to Lora, another adolescent lost in a harsh Calvinistic world, to appear later in *Shroud My Body Down*; and Young Davie, Pan or the Devil or both, is certainly close kin to the "No 'Count Boy." Here again is revealed that tragic conflict between the austerities and prohibitions

of orthodox Protestantism in one of its sterner forms, and the yearnings and desires of natural man.

The influence of the Moscow Art Theatre is clearly perceptible in this stylized, fantastic drama, dealing with the inner struggles and complexities of human personality, in a framework somewhat removed from reality. From this point on, the effort to amplify the limits of the stage by the use of music becomes an essential element in every one of Paul Green's plays. Of this effort he has said, writing specifically of *Roll, Sweet Chariot*:

> Here it is 1934 in the theatre and still I am writing plays without conscious regard for their feasibility on the stage. Mechanical skill has slowed the modern stage to whirl on its axis and mindlessly to scale the proscenium; more suave than an acrobat, it can land on its feet and receive the plaudits of the populace without so much as a panting breath. Illusions are created by a system of gears—never mind what illusions—an illicit kiss is timed by a chronometer, and yet I am making plays which are difficult to effectuate on the stage.
>
> So I am told. I cannot recall the names of the managers who told me, or how many, since *Potter's Field* was first written. Now it is called *Roll, Sweet Chariot*, and is being produced by a manager who has found no insuperable obstacle in a stage direction which states "a blast is heard nearby, and the shacks are crumbled." By some slight devising, perhaps of a bolt or a screw, a playwright's imagination has been permitted to conquer over mechanics and a necessary tragic phase to be punctuated.
>
> Obviously, feasibility was not the whole issue. Managerial reticence becomes a cascade of fear when some convention of the theatre is about to be overthrown. The undifferentiated audience, which comes to the theatre hoping to see what it expected to see, to learn what it already knows, is haunting as a ghost. In Hollywood, when the Great Common Denominator eludes the writer's brain, he may as well give in to the maggots. No breath-taking wizardry of mechanics was needed to bring *Roll, Sweet Chariot* to the stage. No wild tornado roaring from the wings. Was the difficulty perhaps the presence of another dimension in the drama—still remarkably unfamiliar in this decade—the dimension of music?
>
> I have not written a play with music, or a play to which music is incidental, or an opera. Unlike *Porgy* and *The Green Pastures*, songs are not introduced

as concomitant atmosphere. Singing voices and melodies parallel the play to color and shade the characters, to intensify the dramatic action, to offer, if they can, their own interlinear message. Music is an unconscious, and to me, inevitable filter in the writing of drama.

Roll, Sweet Chariot (a revision of the play published first in 1931 as *Potter's Field* in a volume with *The House of Connelly* and *Tread the Green Grass*) is a development of sketches and plays previously written; the idea for it had been held and shaped in the author's mind for a long time before it reached this three-act version, probably ever since his college days. Briefly, it is a panoramic drama of a Negro community, with a great many characters who contribute to build up the total picture of a Southern slum closely resembling that on the western outskirts of Chapel Hill. The approach of a new concrete highway threatens the teeming community with destruction, as the white's man's civilization blindly obliterates the rich values of humor, song, relaxed living, which are inherent in Negro life.

The play was produced in New York in 1934, with music by Dolphe Martin. In spite of an excellent cast, headed by Frank Wilson, Rose McLendon, and Warren Coleman, the play lasted only seven performances. The author, who watched in agony the first-night performance at the Cort, felt that everything went wrong. "The actors," he said, "played separate and aloof solitaire. The voice of the Almighty (the white man's law), which had been placed high in the scenery loft by means of a loud speaker, blew a fuse in the midst of its stern admonition to the struggling and wayward Negro villagers. The already puzzled audience broke into laughter." Green was so upset by the limping performance that he went out into the street, listening anxiously for any sound of applause. "But none came. A man came out instead, irate, hot and bothered. He was a big fellow, and to my then disordered imagination he looked at least seven feet long. 'Play or no play!' he said, 'I'm going to smoke.' It was Bob Benchley, and I knew we were sunk."

The New York critics did not altogether like it; some were bored by it, finding the many characters and the intricate counterpoint of dialogue tedious and confusing; others hailed it as legitimate experimentation in a new dramatic form.

XV. HOLLYWOOD

Paul Green's desire to transcend the limitations of theatrical production, to increase the expressiveness of the theatre, may supply at least one answer to a question that has occasionally been asked him: How can an artist of such obvious integrity and seriousness have gone to Hollywood? For to Hollywood he went in 1932, with a contract to write for Warner Brothers. The needs of a growing family unquestionably played a part in his decision to put aside being a professor and to pick up some ready money. Two more daughters had been born to the Greens, Betsy in 1930 and Janet in 1931. There were, too, the demands of a household operated on the basis of hospitality and generosity extending beyond the family to servants, needy students, and aspiring writers. The answer seems obvious on practical grounds.

Green was also tempted to the movies by his wish to experiment, to find out whether or not this new medium offered a solution to that tantalizing search for ways to make the spoken word upon the stage convey more meaning than it ever had before. Could the films do things the traditional stage could not do? Could they enrich and illumine drama?

Back in 1915 Paul Green had been deeply moved by *The Birth of a Nation*. He rode over thirty-five miles of miry road from

Lillington to Raleigh to see this really great picture, and he realized at once its power over the audience:

> A frenzy ran among the spectators like fire among broomstraw. There were yells and shouts, clenching of fists and loud unashamed oaths. . . . I saw *The Birth of a Nation* many times, and its effect on the audience was always much the same . . .

Another silent film which impressed him was Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms*, which Green saw in 1919 in a French cantonment for American soldiers. "He was the divine magician playing with the bauble of our souls for an hour . . . and from that day to this I have followed wherever he leads." Later on Green went ten times to see Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*. It was with these memories and conceptions of the power of the movies to stir and delight the human heart that he went to California.

It was a very serious young writer who first appeared in Hollywood. Lee Shippey, columnist of the *Los Angeles Times*, has given a gently derisive but at the same time respectful picture of Green when he arrived:

> Paul Green is one of those serious Southerners. He looks at life very earnestly, almost as earnestly as he does at Paul Green.
>
> When he joined the staff of Warner Brothers a few weeks ago, story after story was submitted to him, all of which he read intently and rejected. "I think they would all be merely wasting my time," he said. So the studio turned these stories over to other men to write, and Green is writing a story for George Arliss around the great character of Voltaire.
>
> He considers Paul Green's time much too valuable to waste.
>
> He has demonstrated "the importance of being earnest" even in Hollywood. Last year he came out here, but declined to do certain things. Unless he could write a story sincerely he declined to write it at all, no matter if the salary per week was several times as much as he had received before. So his contract ended. This year he was recalled to finish unfinished work in his own way. Which comes pretty near to establishing a record.

Shippey drew these optimistic conclusions much too quickly; Green has never yet succeeded in establishing his independence to

write film stories in exactly his own way. The story of his association with Hollywood is one of a series of disillusionments, fallings-out, reconciliations, final farewells and attempts to patch up. He incorrigibly hopes that he will find in the films that art medium which he conceives them potentially to be, and he is repeatedly disappointed by the producers' lack of daring, sincerity, and idealism. He usually leaves Chapel Hill with an air of martyrdom not always convincing to his colleagues on the faculty to whom the salaries of filmdom sound fabulous; and he always has an air of relief at being back home again.

Paul Green has told in his own words the story of his hopes and disappointments in the movies. Here is his first reaction to Hollywood:

> Here were hundreds of acres of buildings where dreams were manufactured, where thousands of people went in and out early and late creating millions of feet of film on which were imprinted little shadows which, placed against a steady light, acted, talked, and danced and spun their thousand-and-one tales of ambition, love, hope, or despair.
>
> The first thing to do was to see inside and get acquainted with the goings-on. And so I did, and tried to understand what I saw. I read all the books on the movies I could get, both European and American. I poked about in the cutting rooms, the wardrobes, the projection rooms and the construction departments. I read the engineers' handbook on light and sound devices. I made myself familiar with all the camera terms from "angle-shot" to "wipe-off." And the more I learned the more enthusiastic I became. Here indeed was the creation of the machine age which was the equal of the Word as spoken by the men of old. Here was a medium infinite and universal in its power, able to depict anything—whether in heaven, or earth, or hell; whatever of man's relation to man or man's deepest submerged self. For the first time in history a completely democratic art form was available, capable of answering any vital demand made upon it by the imagination of any human being. For the first time in the history of the world we had a dramatic medium in the movies which could be understood by black and white, yellow or red, the only requirement being that the audience must be able to see or hear—better if it could do both. For pantomime is and can be understood by all men of whatever race, creed, or calling. . . .

For several weeks I labored on a script, trying to measure up in some degree to the camera which was to express the story I had to tell. No one hurried me, nobody said do this or that. Apparently I was left free to do as I chose. What was this nonsense I had heard about the cramping power of Hollywood and its slave-driving methods with writers? I began to doubt tales of woe which brethren of my kind had been wont to tell. At last my script was in some sort of final shape, and conferences with producer, director, leading actor, and men of the technical staff began. The scenario was read, discussed, and tentatively accepted. I was pleased to find that the boss men said only a little revision was needed here and there and the thing would be ready for shooting. The revisions suggested seemed sensible enough, and I gladly tried to make them. So the script was finally delivered into the producer's hands, and I began another job while it was being shot. Now and then, I would hear a report from the lot that "everything was going fine," and I was beginning to feel some pride in the fact that this picture was to be a little better maybe than the general Hollywood product. A few times I went on the set and watched the making and came away with nothing but admiration for the studio and its employees. How hard and seriously everybody seemed to be working . . .

When the picture was finally completed, I went down town to see it. It turned out to be a straightforward, level, and unimpressive thing. Whatever touch of inspiration I thought I had in writing it was gone. On referring to my script, I found a bit here, a bit there, this end of a scene, this key line of a scene changed or left out. Somebody had been there while I was gone. I discussed the matter some days later with another writer. . . . "Yes", he said "they gave your script to me to look over. I hope you didn't mind. We often have to do that."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Well, smooth things up. You see, your script leaned too much toward one of those cussed artistic productions, and that's a thing no studio will allow. There's not a cent of money in them."

"How do you know there's not?"

"Listen, this is a business out here, not an art."

Thus the democratic and omnipotent medium, which had held out to Paul Green the possibility of expressing all his dreams and imaginings, proved to be just another cautiously curbed and manipulated machine for making money.

The studios have a product to sell to the masses of the world [added Green], and in order to sell to everybody they think they must strike a common denominator of general illiteracy and bad taste. Perhaps they must. Their pictures are standardized by what they consider to be the intelligence quotient of the majority of people in the small villages and crossroad places.

During this first stay in Hollywood Paul Green wrote the script for *Voltaire* and also the movie versions of Kroll's *Cabin in the Cotton*, in which Richard Barthelmess starred, Phil Stong's *State Fair*, James Cozzens' *Dr. Bull*, and *David Harum*. The three last were all vehicles for Will Rogers. Not one of them satisfied Green's hopes.

In 1934 the movie version of his *The House of Connelly*, meaninglessly renamed *Carolina*, had its world première at the Carolina Theatre in Charlotte. It was directed by Henry King, with Janet Gaynor and Lionel Barrymore as the stars. Whatever subtlety and suggestiveness the original had were lost in the movie, whose scene in a grasp at low-country glamour had been transplanted to South Carolina. The attempt at Charleston romance dulled the overtones and smeared the biting reality of the play, resulting in a pastiche of the old South, complete with white columns, juleps, moonlight, and magnolias. It disappointed all who had liked the play, and especially the author, who thus had forcibly brought home to him the failure of the movies to enhance legitimate drama.

In spite of his disillusionment and his distrust of the cramping effect of censorship, he did not immediately lose faith in the potential development of the movies as a medium of expression. Hollywood must free itself, he thought, from the domination of money and censorship; the two are very closely linked, since the censor keeps the producers informed as to what the public will stand for and what it wants and what will call forth protests from pressure groups. The movies of the future must be free to experiment. What he likes to call "the imaginative cinema" must recog-

nize its difference from the art of the theatre as well as its resemblances.

> But in each the poet as a creator shall be supreme. In the cinema he has a means of universal and infinite power—the camera. . . . And under such conditions poetry will again return to the stage, and the freedom that Shakespeare knew in his Elizabethan theatre will be ours with greater enchantment. And whereas the new cinema art form will be the imaginative sight and sound unlimited, so the new theatre will be the home of the imaginative word and vitalized being unbound. And once more, as in the days of Shakespeare, we shall be able to parade before our vision all the manifestations of nature and the subtleties of the mind which are usable in the movie medium. And once more music in the theatre will return to us, above which the high poets' words are calling.

This was written in 1934, just two years after his experience with Hollywood. Here spoke not only the unquenchable idealist, but the sincere artist.

Back from this sojourn in Hollywood, Green became interested in starting a "little cinema" movement, which might have upon the movies the same liberating and vivifying effect that the "little theatre" movement had had upon the commercial theatre. He also attempted, without success, to secure funds from the Rockefeller Foundation to establish at the University of North Carolina a school of instruction in the writing and production of moving pictures. He still hopes to see such a school set up as a pioneer in the South in college motion picture work. It would be a natural associate of the Playmakers' work in developing original plays, and of the Communications Center in radio work. One of his projects for such a school would be the recording of folk speech and folk tales in natural settings. This is a dream which has not yet been realized.

Some ten years later, after a six-months interval in Hollywood working for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer on the dramatization of A. J. Cronin's *The Green Years*, he somewhat reversed his earlier criticisms of motion pictures.

> The movies are the great peoples' theatre [he said to a reporter from *The News and Observer* in December 1944], and they are getting better and better. . . . The position of movie writers is constantly improving, and the tendency now is toward allowing these writers to publish their works which heretofore have been pooled and discarded when their purpose had been served.

XVII. GREENWOOD

One result of his work in Hollywood was that when Paul Green returned to Chapel Hill, he felt secure enough financially to give up teaching and to spend all his time writing. Since then he has continued an informal and unpaid connection with the Department of Dramatic Art at the University. When at home in Chapel Hill, he is available for conferences with students of creative writing and with the Playmakers.

The house in the Glen, even though it had been more than doubled in size, began to seem overcrowded, with four young children and many visitors. Even the cabin study was not secluded enough. Paul Green felt that the near-by woods and slopes of the Glen fenced him in too closely. He wanted, he said, a place he could see out from. During an afternoon ramble while he and Elizabeth were students in the University, they had picked out a place which looked ideal for a home site. Somewhat southeast of Chapel Hill, about two and a half miles from town, a long wooded spur stretches out from the main ridge on which the village is built. The eastern tip of this spur juts like a promontory from a green sea of meadow land. The woods had been cleared away from this end, and the land falls away on three sides, sloping down to a gentle little stream in the low ground. There are wide views on every side except toward the highway. As a farm house had once stood there, the location had several tall elms to arch over it; and there were still some flowering shrubs, spiraea,

flowering almond, the common ones of the region, planted long ago. In 1933 Paul Green bought a two-hundred acre tract of land including this farm. He did not, however, build a home there immediately. Instead, he put up a four-room cottage, whose pine-panelled study, with its immense field-stone fireplace, afforded a retreat to which he could come and write when the Glen became too noisy and which could serve as headquarters for the direction of farming operations.

Because of Green's gift for attracting friends, the study, as he then called it, came to serve another purpose. With a leaping fire in the great cavern of a fireplace, with hamburgers to broil over the coals, with music and dancing and congenial friends, the study became the scene of memorable evenings. Green had found somewhere an old-fashioned parlor organ, which he greatly enjoyed playing. Frequently Fred McCall would play his guitar, or some of Green's Negro friends would make music for the crowd.

This study formed the nucleus of the Greens' present home. Two large wings were built on either side of it, the result being a comfortable-looking white clapboard house which stands against the surrounding sky and distant valley with a gesture of welcome. The airiness of the elms enhances without cutting off the view. A small formal flower garden, over which Elizabeth Green works hard and long, has been laid out to one side. Beyond it an extensive vegetable garden supplies food for the family and friends, and great quantities for canning. Green has always done a great deal of the manual work on the farm; he enjoys cutting down trees, sawing up logs, digging ditches, and running the tractor.

The new house at Greenwood contained, among other expanded quarters, a large living room with another big fireplace, and three walls of book shelves from floor to ceiling.

XVIII. NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

From the beginning Green had written not only poetry and plays but prose pieces, sketches, and short stories. In the twenties these began to appear in some of the North Carolina newspapers, and also in *The Reviewer*, *The Southwest Review*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. In 1928 McBride published a collection of his short stories under the title *Wide Fields*. The author was still somewhat under the spell of playmaking; he gave in dramatic style at the front of this little book the time, "the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first decade or so of the twentieth"; the place, "Little Bethel neighborhood in eastern North Carolina"; and the characters, "Men, women and children of that countryside." The themes are those familiar in his plays: the conflict between conventional religion and pagan delight in life, the privations and defeats of the tenant, the uncertainties and joys and returning cycles of farm life. There are foreshadowings here of later works; for instance, "Her Birthday" suggests the themes of a lost aristocracy of both *The House of Connelly* and *The Laughing Pioneer;* the conflict in "The Devil's Instrument" is that of *The Field God* and *Tread the Green Grass;* "A Tempered Fellow" has a hint of the fully developed story of Alvin and Ethel Barnes in *This Body the Earth*. The texture of these stories is honest homespun, substantially woven of such well-observed and well-remembered details (sometimes poetic, sometimes realistic) as spider webs wet with dew on the cotton, tiny pink and silver clouds called in the country "rain-seeds," katydids, and whippoorwills, tying up fodder, spreading compost, cutting cornstalks, and the carefree joshing of a cornshucking party.

The Laughing Pioneer, Paul Green's first novel, which appeared in 1932, continues the story of the Little Bethel community. As in the short stories and plays, the description of the setting is based on accurate knowledge of the soil and farming conditions

of the coastal plain of eastern North Carolina. This story of the attempt at rehabilitation of an ancient and decaying estate reminds the reader of *The House of Connelly*, as does the picture of an anachronistic aristocracy. Danny, the "laughing pioneer," is the eternal gypsy, the dreamer who must see beyond the horizon; he represents freedom, love of beauty and song, all the lovely quicksilver quality of life repressed by and forever escaping the narrow bounds of a prejudiced neighborhood. He appeals to Alice Long, the spinster nurtured on "pride and negligence and death," but the dark tides of bigotry and "poor white morality" overwhelm her in the end. As in all of Green's work, the details of landscape and folkways are sharply etched; hog-killings, revivals, the country store, Christmas serenaders, sermons, night-riders, broken fences overgrown with sassafras, loblolly pine and beggar's lice, the sound of a horse's hoofs clopping on icy roads, of hens going to roost in catalpa trees—these are real and immediate. The minor characters, the Negroes and the children, live with a vitality which the main characters, especially Alice Long and Rorie Armstrong, do not fully possess. Green's hand is less sure when he portrays the local bluebloods in their post-war desolation than when he creates Negro and sharecropper characters. The period of the novel is that of *The House of Connelly*, about the turn of the century.

A second novel, *This Body the Earth*, which followed in 1935, is far richer in substance and more successfully worked out than *The Laughing Pioneer*. Indeed, it is probably the most moving and most genuine portrayal in American fiction to date of the life of a Southern sharecropper. The novel recounts the life history of Alvin Barnes, but it is also the biography of a class of a region.

The scene is again that Little Bethel neighborhood. The period is 1885-1920, years which may well be taken as the time of most of Green's writing before the historical dramas. The characters belong to that class of tenant farmers who are always moving on, playing the "eternal games of puss-in-the-corner," always hoping for better land, a kinder landlord, weather more favorable to the cash crops. The novel begins and ends with a child crying for home. Alvin Barnes, who happens to be stronger, more ambitious, more determined than the rest of his family, resolves that he will rise above his class, that he will by his own might become a landowner; into this resolution he puts all his brawn, all his will and his soul, and he almost succeeds. He is defeated in the end by the wretched system of "big fish eat little fish," tenants enslaved by debt to landlords, who are in turn enslaved to banks and holding companies. Even more than *The Laughing Pioneer*, this novel is written out of deep memory. The details of cotton and tobacco farming, of barn-raising, of logging, of marketing crops have a fourth dimensional quality which can come only from actual experience. Alvin's life moves through the rhythm of the season, clearing, planting, cotton-picking, corn-gathering, marketing, harvesting, and starting all over again. The reader follows with quickening suspense his struggles to own his land and to defeat the system; the drama of his defiance is well sustained. Many of the scenes cling to the memory, especially the tender and poignant episode of Rassie in the first chapter, the account of floating logs down to Fayetteville and young Alvin's adventures in that glittering city, the orgy of the Holy Rollers' revival, the box party at which Alvin outbids all rivals for Ivy's box, and the genuinely terrifying scenes in the convict camp.

XIX. NEW DRAMATIC FORMS

Paul Green has maintained a decided loyalty to the Carolina Playmakers, who produced and published his student plays, even to the extent of entrusting to them the production of some of his

later and major dramas. *Shroud My Body Down* and *The Enchanted Maze* both had their premières in Chapel Hill, one in 1934 and one in 1935. Both of them aroused long and at times heated discussion in the University community.

The Playmakers produced *Shroud My Body Down* just fifteen years after the production of Green's first Playmaker play, "The Last of the Lowries." Lamar Stringfield composed the musical score. An over-critical audience, many of them on familiar terms with Paul Green as friends and neighbors, felt themselves qualified to tear his play to pieces and rewrite it for him. And tear it to pieces they did. Mystification was probably the most conspicuous reaction. What is it about? What actually happens? What in the world is Paul driving at? Meetings were held for the sole purpose of discussing the play. Bridge games were broken up and dinner parties stimulated by arguments over its meaning.

Shroud My Body Down remains a somewhat enigmatic play. Much of the initial confusion resulted from the type of production which the Playmakers, schooled in realism, gave it. The author's subtitle is "A Folk Dream." On the second page of his manuscript he has written "To be produced by living actors trained in the manner of marionettes and with masks when so specified." Here is evident the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre. He wished to remove the action of *Shroud My Body Down* a step away from reality, to have it acted on a different plane, a real scene reflected in a mirror. This slight but perceptible distance from reality is part of the perennial charm of the marionettes, and a similarly stylized and dreamlike production would probably clarify *Shroud My Body Down.* It is not a narrative of actual events, and any attempt to interpret it as such breaks down in confusion.

As in his symphonic dramas, Green has thought of this play as interwoven with music, underlining and expanding the meaning of the lines. The author has perhaps attempted here to weave

together too many different elements. The theme seems at times to be a study of the adolescent personality of Lora, her gropings toward emotional expression, her vaguely incestuous desires, her impulses toward ideal beauty, and the final tragic overshadowing of Lora by her father's consciousness of sin; at other times the theme is the tragedy of Graham himself, the proud Calvinist who denies life and who is finally destroyed by his denial.

> Mr. Graham willed one thing and God another
> and all these years he's fought
> Against God's will.

Shroud My Body Down seeks to transcribe, in terms of their own subsconscious dreams, the stifled emotions of inarticulate people; the task the author set himself is an almost impossible one, which needs for adequate expression the full enhancement of music. The people of the play belong to the Little Bethel neighborhood; they live close to the earth.

The Enchanted Maze, which the Playmakers produced in December 1935, stirred up even more excitement in the University town. The discussions of *Shroud My Body Down* had been for the most part on a literary plane, with glances at aesthetics, theories of drama, music and staging, no personal feelings being involved. *The Enchanted Maze,* however, had been announced as "a satire on the American educational system," and it is possible that a substantial part of the audience in Chapel Hill, not overjoyed at being satirized, went prepared at least for disagreement. Although a program note disclaimed any attempt to portray a particular university, it was impossible to see the play in Memorial Hall in Chapel Hill, with full awareness that Green had spent most of his mature life in this university town, without placing his scenes at the University of North Carolina. For the same reason, the local and topical and controversial nature of the play makes it difficult to evaluate from a literary point of view.

Like *Shroud My Body Down, The Enchanted Maze* employs

music as auxiliary to the spoken word, although the music is far less important in interpreting it, since the events are actual, not dreams and the waverings of the subconscious. *Shroud My Body Down* mystified Chapel Hill; *The Enchanted Maze* irritated the community. In brief, the play describes the experiences of Billy Parker, who goes through college seeking some assurance, some absolute response to his search for the ideal, and is continually disappointed by the sterile, uninspired, and baffling instruction which he encounters. A mystic at heart, he finds that facts as presented in scientific courses, far from providing him with clues to the mystery of life, rather convince him of the futility of existence. Green weights the scales against university teaching, however, because he does not in this play introduce his hero to any classes in the humanities; perhaps Billy Parker might have found in great literature nobly interpreted the beauty and significance which he so desperately sought. Green has elsewhere admitted that in at least one instance he found such inspiration in an English classroom. As a critique of the average college curriculum the play is one-sided; as a series of scenes of college life it has moments of humor and of truthfulness. Green has been accused of lacking a sense of humor; the scene in which the loyal fraternity brothers are trying to "cram" the football star sufficiently full of *Macbeth* to pass an examination is a strong denial of that lack.

During the three days that the play was being presented on the campus, discussion flared again and again as to how far the indignations and disillusionments of Billy Parker were applicable to the University of North Carolina, specifically, and to American universities in general. *The News and Observer* (Raleigh) in an editorial commended the University for its tolerance in allowing the play to be presented on the campus. "Of course the play is not local in its connotations," said Proff Koch. "It is an honest endeavor on the part of the playwright to represent conditions common to all American Universities . . . . Billy Parker is a

highly sensitive youth lost in the maze of the modern world. He is by no means typical of every university student."

In *The Enchanted Maze* Paul Green had his say about university education. In *Johnny Johnson,* another play with music, he wrote a commentary on the tragic folly of war. Not as mystifying as *Shroud My Body Down,* nor as controversial as *The Enchanted Maze,* it lacks the haunting poetry of the first and the pungency of the second. The sound basic concept of the natural good man lost and driven in the herd insanity of war is told in three acts and thirteen scenes. The play has humor, indignation, sadness, and at times satire, but in many instances the fantasy strays into burlesque. Kurt Weill, whom Paul Green had first met in Germany and who had later come to Chapel Hill to work with Green, composed a biting counterpoint of music for *Johnny Johnson,* contributing greatly to the atmosphere. The Group Theatre produced it in New York in November 1936, to the considerable bewilderment of the critics, who reacted much as the Chapel Hill audience had to *Shroud My Body Down.* Brooks Atkinson, who had been continuously sympathetic with Green's experimentation and who had always recognized his fundamental poetic quality, wrote of *Johnny Johnson* in *The New York Times*:

> Part fantasy, part musical satire, part symbolic poetry in the common interests of peace; and also, one is compelled to add, part good and part bad, since new forms cannot be created overnight. There are many interludes in Mr. Green's work when both the satire and the idealism wither away to restless emptiness. Although Mr. Green is an honest and exultant poet he is not a virtuoso theatre man. . . . This column proposes to celebrate a sincere and generally exalting attempt to put on the stage an imaginative portrait of recent history.

From the biographical point of view, the significance of *Johnny Johnson* lies in its revelation of what those months on the Western Front in 1918 meant to the mind and heart of a young poet, the impassioned reaction of a man of sense and feeling to the colossal stupidity of war. Green's attitude was not, however,

that of the pacifist. In 1943, after he had seen his only son go into World War II as an ensign in the United States Navy, he wrote to a friend:

> War is and always has been the great tragedy of man, specifically and generally. It is an experiment and experience in ultimate waste. It is the sneak-thief destroyer and whoring accomplice of corroding time, the cruel and malign marauder of humanity's sweet hopes. The one proof that the world is not yet civilized is that we continue to indulge in it. One cannot say too much against war. Jesus is right, all the great religious teachers like Gandhi are right, in declaring it a method of madness and no way out at all for man and his troubles. Rather it only adds to these troubles, intensifies and magnifies them. These teachers are right when they say that the one way to get rid of war with its killings, burnings, and mutilitations is to renounce force forever as a practice among men, have nothing to do with violence—be a conscientious objector like you, if you will. It is hard for a thoughtful kindly man to stomach war with its rot and stench and vomit of blood, and the more so if he happens to have an extra touch of the artist's urge and sensitivity as you have. Twenty-five years ago when I enlisted in the first world war I believed it true and I believe it now.

In all these plays Paul Green experimented with a new dramatic form, groping toward a closer intergration of music and the spoken word, and a more stylized production than is generally familiar. In these plays Green also tried to put upon the stage the subconscious, the dream, the inner tension, the tangled shadows and half-realized overtones of human experience. It may be that he had not fully mastered the form he was trying to shape; it may also be that these plays were never given exactly the kind of production which they demanded. They were written not to be read, but to be acted; lines, which on paper seemed thin and subdued, on the stage came alive and danced and glowed to music.

Part III

". . . yet all these things can be put to use in what, some years ago, I began to call the symphonic drama. . . ."

XX. THE LOST COLONY

In one of the letters which Green wrote to Proff Koch from Germany, back in 1929, he alluded to his hope of writing "that Virginia Dare sort of lyrical song-drama." The story of Sir Walter Raleigh's colonists, vanished forever from the outer fringe of the American wilderness, had fascinated him from childhood. He probably had it in mind when he wrote:

> Who among us has told the story of the lonesome seashore, of the early settlers along that ocean, of the wrecks and disasters there? Along the empty sand banks lie the rotting ribs of many a ship, the disappearing records of struggle and death. In this wide and barren land of sand and battered trees are symbols of man and his bravery enough to move an army. And yet through all these years they have failed to touch the heart of a single North Carolinian. . . .

For years this dream of a play which would tell fittingly the romantic Roanoke Island story had been carried around in his poet's mind, as writers do carry around and shape within them ideas which appeal to them strongly. Yet when he was first asked by the Roanoke Island Historical Association to write a pageant to celebrate the 350th Anniversary of the birth of Virginia Dare, he not only poured cold water on the project, but, in the words of W. O. Saunders, President of the Association, "released the whole of Niagara." Paul Green does nothing by halves, not even discouraging a foolish idea.

"Green Opposes Island Pageant" headlined *The News and Observer* on April 13, 1936—a headline that reads strangely years later, in view of the subsequent history of the Manteo drama. But the fantastic high-flown plans of the Association irritated and aroused the farmer in Paul Green, his practical humanitarian side. At a banquet in Manteo on April 12, held for the purpose of discussing plans for the celebration, W. O. Saunders had unfolded grandiose outlines of a "gorgeous, spectacular, intimate pageant-drama that would attract the plaudits of the English-speaking

world and would bring millions of tourists from all parts of the world, just as millions are attracted to Oberammergau in the hills of Bavaria."

"There's not a chance it would work without a more religious motive behind it," muttered Green to the Oberammergau part. Saunders went on to suggest that the islanders

> . . . should live history to the point of allowing their hair to grow long and affecting the speech of the Elizabethan period if necessary, and perform this history in a pageant that would be a national epic three or four times a week during the five months of the tourist season, and at the same time the fishermen could produce fish and the farmers vegetables, fruits, poultry, eggs and dairy products to feed the tourists and Roanoke Island would never have to be dependent on the government. Every spare room could be rented and at the same time the primitiveness of the island could be preserved. . . .

The idea of having the Roanoke Island natives go Elizabethan was too much for Paul Green's common sense and country humor. "If I had a house and an extra room," he said, "I would hate like the devil to be bothered with some belly-aching tourist." He went on to point out with considerable fervor the basic economic needs of the islanders for more decent living conditions, and dismissed the whole idea of writing a pageant and exploiting the tourists by saying,

> Nuts to it. What should be done would be to have some professors come to Dare County to make surveys and report to other parts of the State how Dare County people can all own their homes and have them freshly painted.

In an editorial headed "History, Hair and Tourists" *The News and Observer* commented on this interchange between Green and Saunders:

> There ought to be room for a middle ground between the Roanoke Island Historical Association and Paul Green.
>
> A good many North Carolinians will share Mr. Green's distaste for the proposal that Roanoke Islanders make an appeal to tourists to the point of letting their hair grow long in the Elizabethan manner, affecting Elizabethan idiom in their speech, in general living on and off the stage a life in the terms of Elizabethan pageantry. Such a business might attract tourists. It would certainly make the islanders "quaint," if not a little queer.
>
> But not all North Carolinians will share Playwright Green's passionate certainty. . . . Not all tourists are belly-achers and it ought not to be necessary for all natives to play quaint for profits. . . . Roanoke Island has true historical resources which deserve development. . . . But to turn hearty islanders into uncertain actors, to attempt to make for tourists a village quaintness like that which Oberammergau made, at least originally, for God, would be going just a trifle too far.
>
> In North Carolina tourists are not only welcome but wanted. But it ought to be possible to make this State attractive to tourists without requiring natives to go about with hair in their eyes.

So far, no Roanoke Islanders have grown Elizabethan hair and adopted the speech of sixteenth-century England. But many of them have developed into no "uncertain actors"; most of them have prospered from the success of *The Lost Colony* and the present situation at Manteo is not far from a realization of the original design of Saunders and the Historical Association. More than a thousand people are now involved in the production; they include actors, musicians, staff, technicians, workmen, citizens. And the thousands who come each summer to see the production must be housed and fed while they are on the island.

In spite of his annoyance at the absurdity of the proposals, the idea of writing a play about Virginia Dare for the anniversary of her birth stirred a response in Green's imagination. By the end of April 1936, he had promised to have the play ready for production by the summer of 1937. At the time he made this decision, Paul Green had under consideration a contract from Samuel Goldwyn which would have paid him over a hundred thousand a year. He returned the contract unsigned because he wanted to stay in North Carolina and write the drama of its first settlement as he felt it should be written. From the point of view of his development as an artist, this decision was a major turning point. It

has led to the creation of symphonic historical dramas, and to the writing of such plays for Manteo, Fayetteville, Williamsburg, and Washington. Others are still in the outline stage.

Interest in commemorating the founding of the Roanoke Island Colony goes back to 1880, when a group of islanders and some of their Edenton neighbors met to consider an appropriate community festival and formed the Roanoke Island Memorial Association. One of the first undertakings of the Association was to buy the site of the original "Citie of Ralegh," at that time a farm in a wooded sixteen-acre tract along the edge of Roanoke Sound. Later they put up the Virginia Dare monument. This group also sponsored memorial services each year on Virginia Dare's birthday, August 18. Very few people could go to the services, since in those days the only way to reach Roanoke Island was by boat across the sound. Some from Edenton used to attend, and a number of islanders. Roanoke Island remained one of the most isolated spots in the state until 1930, when a bridge from Nag's Head and the Wright Memorial Bridge over Currituck Sound gave it two cables to the mainland.

The two bridges opened up the island to tourists, who were not slow in discovering its "quaintness." The bridges also made it possible to consider plans for a larger celebration. In 1932 the newly formed Roanoke Island Historical Association secured the help of the Works Progress Administration in restoring the fort, chapel, and village as nearly as possible as they must have been in the brief days of John White's colony. Soon a sixteenth-century village of thatched cabins built of rough-hewn logs grew up again among the pines and myrtles and yaupon trees of the island. In 1934 the islanders presented for two performances a pageant based on the story of the Lost Colony. Although this community-produced pageant was little more than the rough outline of a drama, it had a moving sincerity and simplicity. Paul Green began to think of his Virginia Dare play as a community drama,

to be produced and acted and shared in by the country people and fisher folk of Roanoke Island. Such indeed it has become.

Paul Green has told part of the story of the development of the Lost Colony project:

> One of the plans was to hold a nationwide beauty contest to select the girl who should play Virginia Dare. At that time they didn't know, nor did I, that when the play came to be written she would be a baby and remain so. In all our minds was the legend that she grew up to be a beautiful maiden, fell in love with the Indian chief Manteo's son, married him, and became the mother of a brave race that somehow evaporated into thin air. As Mr. Fearing, Mr. Saunders, and others went on with their work, I who had always been interested in the romantic and tragic story of these early colonists joined with them. But our combined efforts produced little more than pledges of money and cooperation, and with the deepening of the depression they amounted to little. Then came the W. P. A. and saved us. Mr. Fearing and his helpers got a project approved to build the theatre, and I set about writing the play. With the aid of Congressman Lindsay Warren, 25,000 memorial fifty-cent coins were minted by the United States which were sold to collectors for a dollar and a half each. Through this means some funds were raised to pay the necessary proportion of materials for the project. And so we were started. But only started, for as the size of the production grew the need for more money increased. The night we opened we were deeply in debt. At least Mr. Fearing and certain local business men were.

Although Paul Green is a long way removed from the commonly held idea of a typical college professor, he has retained the professorial habit of painstaking research. Before beginning to write *The Lost Colony*, he prepared himself by reading everything he could find on the history of the period. He spent a great deal of time in the North Carolina Collection of the Library at Chapel Hill; it is scarcely possible to pick up a book on the early history of the State or of the first settlements in this country which does not bear his name on the borrower's card. He studied thoroughly not only the history but also the music of the sixteenth century, the church music, the popular airs, the folk tunes; for from the first he thought of the Roanoke Island play as another

"symphonic drama." The author himself prefers the word *play* for these historical productions rather than *pageant*, because, he says, "they tell a story; and the characters are individuals, not types, as is usually the case in masques and pageants."

The final result was, however, so warmed by the poet's imagination that it is much more than accurate history dramatically presented. It has that touch beyond the ordinary, that inexplicable quality of illumination and excitement which distinguishes true poetry. This is the quality which has moved and stirred thousands of spectators. The material was ready at the author's hand, in one of the most pathetic and at the same time fascinating episodes in the history of the United States, but he has lifted it up and colored it with implications richer than fact. When it became known that Green was writing the play, someone remarked, "Well, at last, Paul won't be able to write about a tenant farmer." But in a sense that is exactly what he has done, for his hero is a dispossessed English farmer seeking new land and a better life, the same goal that continually eluded Alvin Barnes in *This Body the Earth;* his rugged Londoners reach toward the New World with the same hunger that drives the sharecropper from one farm to another. The land of fragrance and fruitfulness which the first reporters to see it had described to the London Company held out a fair promise of escape from meagreness and poverty. The whole drama expresses again the author's deep sympathy for the denied, the outcast, and the lost:

> For here once walked the men of dreams,
> The sons of hope and pain and wonder,
> Upon their foreheads truth's bright diadem,
> The light of the sun in their countenance,
> And their lips singing a new song—
> A song for ages yet unborn,
> For us the children that came after them—
> "O new and mighty world to be!"
> They sang,
> "O land majestic, free, unbounded!"

The dream of the men and women who established the first settlement on Roanoke Island, at the thin edge of the vast dark wilderness into which they disappeared, is still the world's dream, a better life and a fairer one for all mankind.

Green made no attempt to suggest a solution of the riddle of the disappearance of the colonists. He implies that, after a winter of famine and disease and death, they were frightened away from their stockade by the sight of a Spanish vessel offshore. The giant cloud of the Spanish Armada, which at that time darkened all England, stretched across the sea to shadow also this poorest and most fragile of her outposts. At the end of the play the colonists, shouldering their pitifully few possessions, begin that long journey into the western wilderness which so many later Americans followed.

> Now down the trackless hollow years
> That swallowed them but not their song
> We send response—
> "O lusty singer, dreamer, pioneer,
> Lord of the wilderness, the unafraid,
> Tamer of darkness, fire and flood,
> Of the soaring spirit winged aloft
> On the plumes of agony and death—
> Hear us, O hear!
> The dream still lives,
> It lives, it lives
> And shall not die!"

In the creation of *The Lost Colony* Paul Green succeeded in that harmonious integration of music and drama, that enlargement of the realm of drama, toward which he had been working. The setting favored him—the whole Atlantic for a backdrop, the sky full of summer stars for a ceiling. Here he had escaped from the "picture-frame stage" convention; the outdoors gave him a freedom and a range impossible in any theatre, and he made the most of it by employing three stages in a long panorama, by shift-

ing lights from side to side, thus creating continuous movement instead of the staccato interruption of scenes, and by unifying the whole with music.

It would be difficult to imagine *The Lost Colony* without music. The play employs all the arts of the theatre—dance, pantomime, lighting; but the glorious music at once frames, enhances, and illumines the action. The score is not original, but compiled from songs, hymns, dance tunes, and carols of sixteenth-century England. Many of the tunes are familiar, since they have survived in church hymnals; stately strains from the Anglican liturgy lend sonority to the score, and their familiarity for most hearers increases the emotional impact. The more solemn music is brightened and embroidered by such lively melodies as "Green Sleeves," "Good Ale," and "The Mermaid." After Green had selected the airs he wished to use, Lamar Stringfield and Adeline McCall arranged the score. The words of many of the lyrics were written by Green, and at least one by Elizabeth Green. The music conveys the whole mood and atmosphere; here is truly a "music-drama."

Brooks Atkinson, who reviewed *The Lost Colony* for *The New York Times* after the first production in 1937, describes it

> . . . as a pageant that has made an extraordinary versatile use of spectacle, sound, pantomime and cadenced speech. . . . [It] is an uncommonly impressive evocation of the daring that seeped into this country from the wave-beaten beaches just north of Hatteras. For Paul Green . . . and the others who have contributed to a community celebration have approached their work in a reverent mood. They believe in what Sir Walter's men were trying to do amid the pines and cypresses at the water's edge. . . . Being chiefly a community enterprise, it overflows with sincerity. For the simple things, when they are honestly intended, are both humbling and exalting. They are more religious than sermons. They are the truth of the spirit that oftentimes makes men greater than they mean to be.

From its initial performance, *The Lost Colony* has had a tremendous appeal for audiences. Its most effective advertising

has been through those who have seen it and say that here is a delight not to be missed. James Street, the Chapel Hill novelist, told someone who admitted to not having seen it, "I'd crawl on my hands and knees all the way from Chapel Hill to Manteo rather than miss that play!"

The original plan had not been to repeat the performance except for special celebrations, but the planners had reckoned without the drawing power of Green's creation. Before the summer of 1938 many letters had been received asking that the play be continued for a second summer, and the producers decided to repeat it. Large audiences saw it each summer from 1937 through 1941; after that it had to be closed for four years because of World War II. The play reopened in the summer of 1946. In 1941 the State took formal recognition of *The Lost Colony* as an institution of importance to North Carolina by underwriting it to the extent of $10,000 a year if necessary, "to serve as a year-to-year guarantee of the continued presentation of this historical and patriotic drama." This is the first time that a state had ever underwritten such an enterprise. By the end of the 1950 season, more than 450,000 people had seen *The Lost Colony*.

From the beginning, the play had been financed as a cooperative, non-profit undertaking. The gate receipts were used for the salaries of actors, musicians and stage hands, and for maintaining the stage setting and production. This immensely successful play meant very little in financial return to the author.

The year 1941 was full of recognition for Paul Green, in addition to the formal adoption of *The Lost Colony* by the State. In January the National Institute of Arts and Letters elected him a member; and he went to New York to be inducted in a ceremony in Carnegie Hall, at which time he was greeted by his friends Struthers Burt and James Boyd, already members. In June, Western Reserve University conferred upon him the honorary degree

of Doctor of Letters, thus bringing this very unacademic professor into the academic fold. In his citation, President W. G. Leutner spoke of Green as a "creative genius whose artistic expression in novel, poetry, and drama has made the common life, the warm passion, and the spiritual striving of the people of your native state a precious heritage of the nation and the English-speaking world."

Also in 1941, his projected book about the Little Bethel Community, "Mr. Mac, the Folk History of a Neighborhood," won the Robert McBride Prize. The novel as such was not published, though much of the material was used later in *Dog on the Sun* (1949). The working draft of the original book, with the author's notes, is still in the vault of the North Carolina Room at the University Library. It consists of a collection of folk anecdotes, lore, superstitions, tales, character sketches, all built around the warm, canny and lovable character of Mr. Mac, miller, antiquarian, and local historian, whose prototype is certainly the Register of Deeds of Harnett County, with whom Paul Green had spent so many interesting hours as a boy.

XXI. THE HIGHLAND CALL

The success of *The Lost Colony* made Green the obvious choice of an author when the Cape Fear Valley Historical Association decided that they had as interesting a story as the folks at Manteo, and would also like to celebrate their history in drama. The celebration took place at Fayetteville in November 1939. It was actually a sort of four-ringed circus, designed to commemorate not only the first settlement of the Cape Fear Valley, but also three other important North Carolina sesquicentennials. One hundred and fifty years ago the newly created State had ratified the Federal Constitution, had ceded the western lands which

formed Tennessee, and had chartered the first state university. The University joined with the State in celebrating these events. There were ceremonies, speech-making, parades and gatherings in Fayetteville, all embellished with brave plaids, the flourish of bagpipes, and much glorification of local Scottish tradition.

Green wrote *The Highland Call* as an important part of this celebration. The subtitle describes it as a "symphonic play of American history in two acts with hymn tunes, folk songs, ballads and dance." The first production took place in the Auditorium in Fayetteville on November 30, 1939, with actors from the Carolina Playmakers. It was not in any sense the community enterprise that *The Lost Colony* had been from its beginning. The first audiences were responsive and pleased, stirred by the traditional melodies, the fine emblazonment of Cape Fear legend and history, the appealing story of Flora Macdonald. The color and vitality of *The Highland Call* charmed the audiences. The play was presented again at Fayetteville in the autumn of 1940, and there was some talk of making it an annual event, but World War II intervened, and the play has not been revived since.

The Highland Call takes up the story of Flora Macdonald and her family in defeat and exile as they leave Scotland for the new world, and follows them through the confused and dubious days of the American Revolution. All but three of the characters in the play are historical personages who actually lived in the Cape Fear region. The materials are much nearer to Green's early memories than those of *The Lost Colony;* the fact that he dedicated the play to his mother, "Another Flora," indicates that he felt the material very close to him. The blood of these Scottish settlers was in his inheritance; he had heard of Flora Macdonald, Jennie Bahn MacNeill, and the battles between the Whigs and the Tories from his childhood. They are as native to the Cape Fear region as cotton, yellow jasmine, pitcher plants, and dogwood. Dramatic situations are plentiful, and ringing convictions, and

high idealism. Possibly because of the choice of Flora Macdonald as a heroine, the author seems at times to be pleading the cause of the British king against the colonists. Actually, Dan Murchison, who stands for all those who have come to the new world to find freedom, utters some of the bravest words of the play; but the really noble figure of Flora Macdonald, courageously loyal to her oath, overshadows him. In a sense this play is a continuation of the story of *The Lost Colony*, adding another act to the dramatization of the establishment of the country, and reaffirming America's destiny as the refuge and hope of oppressed people. Here, as among the English colonists who left London for Roanoke Island, are humble and hungry folk, who, afire with belief in a new chance, have turned their backs on bleak Scotland and a heritage of war. Like John Borden in *The Lost Colony*, Dan Murchison is blood brother to Alvin Barnes and to Abraham McCranie. *The Highland Call* is one more movement in Paul Green's growing symphony of the American dream.

As in the case of *The Lost Colony* Green's writing of *The Highland Call* was preceded by careful research into the history of the period and the locality. Through such research he because convinced that the American Revolution was much more closely a bitter civil war than American popular histories have been inclined to describe it. The divisions between Whig and Tory were often quite literally between brother and brother. The real Flora Macdonald was determined to keep her oath at whatever cost. Her tragedy is therefore one of defeat and denial. Because of the sympathy aroused for her, the audience cannot receive from that defeat the emotional lift which they experience from the superb assurance at the end of *The Lost Colony*.

The music for *The Highland Call* is made up of traditional Scotch ballads, dances, hymns, and carols. Charles Vardell, of Salem College, Winston-Salem, composed the organ overtures

for both acts, weaving into them the folk music of the Highlands. The other airs and melodies were collected and chosen by Green.

Green also collaborated with Charles Vardell in a cantata to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Moravian community at 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 finally took shape as a long unrhymed poem which Vardell set to music for chorus and orchestra. *Song in the Wilderness* embodies some of the ideas of both *The Lost Colony* and *The Highland Call*, the quest in the new world for freedom and human dignity and righteousness:

> Here in the heart of these deep woods,
> In the peace and bosomed richness of these hills,
> Our forefathers came seeking a dwelling place,
> A shelter for themselves and the light they cherished.
> Not by hate and the iron fist, they said,
> But by love and the friendly open hand
> Shall a man survive the greenery of his days
> And reap the mellow harvest of his soul.
> Here upon this very spot, this sacred place, they stood
> And set their living credo up, a faith,
> Like a tree to flourish by the waterside.

Song in the Wilderness was first presented as one part of the Fifth Piedmont Music Festival in Winston-Salem in June 1947. The Music Festival that year coincided with the 175th anniversary of the founding of Salem College. The cantata, composed by Vardell for a chorus of mixed voices with a baritone solo and orchestral accompaniment, was sung by a chorus of three hundred in the R. J. Reynolds Memorial Auditorium. The music, clearly phrased in the modern idiom, perhaps lacks the romantic sentiment which the poem suggests, although musicians find it interesting and satisfying.

The idea of historical presentation, combining the resources of folk music and legend in the vitalizing of local history, has continued to appeal to Paul Green. One reason for his interest in regional plays is to be found in his conviction that the theatre in the United States needs decentralization.

There should be more active producing theatres in all the states, instead of the present concentration in New York. The present summer theatres in the North and East should be extended over the entire country and should play the year round. "As long," he says, "as the American drama stays bottled up in the narrow neck and cul-de-sac of Broadway, we can expect nothing better than what we have."

XXII. UNPOPULAR CAUSES AND A PLAY

During the summer of 1940 Green collaborated with Richard Wright in converting the latter's novel, *Native Son*, into a play for Broadway. The theme of the novel, the shaping of a criminal by social and economic pressures, appealed strongly to the author of *In Abraham's Bosom*. This is the story of a Negro whose crime results from society's denial of his basic rights.

> In the American democratic theory [he said], we have a method of stimulating first by the theory of equality, and then we have tokens which frustrate. Every year we stimulate college boys and tell them to go forth, and there's nowhere to go.
>
> That's not altogether confined to one race. We have sixteen million people who mainly because of their color don't have the opportunities we have. In a democracy every tub should stand on its own bottom—everybody ought to have a chance to develop his full talents. In *Native Son* Bigger Thomas could have got a job shining shoes, but he didn't want that and perhaps his ability was far above that. But he was frustrated and he committed a horrible crime, as the only way he could express himself.

Green's swift and instinctive championship of 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 some one 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, 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, came 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 defendants had not been proved quilty beyond a reasonable doubt. As Couch put it, "The law had functioned in a haphazard manner, and had left the way open for prejudiced persons to secure the conviction of possibly innocent men." 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 reopened, and the sentences commuted.

In another instance, during World War II, Green again took up an unpopular cause, that of a faculty member who had been selected by the Office of War Information as one of a group to go to Germany and teach democracy. Prior to 1941 this teacher was

reported to have expressed pro-fascist opinions in his classroom and even on occasion to have published such opinions. A campus group who questioned his competence as an interpreter of democracy suggested that the Office of War Information should look into his record; and as a result of the investigation, the professor's appointment was cancelled. Paul Green felt that the man had been made the victim of a petty academic witch hunt, and defended him with all the force of which he was capable, at the risk of endangering some very close friendships.

Another crusade to which Paul Green has given himself wholeheartedly is that to abolish capital punishment. In *Roll, Sweet Chariot* and in the convict-camp chapter of *This Body the Earth* and in several of his later short stories, 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, he launched instead into a violent denunciation of capital punishment, including a description of an actual execution, which startled and shocked an audience assembled for nothing more disturbing than a literary tea.

His belief in the dignity of human life and in the individual's right to justice probably influenced Green in his decision to collaborate in dramatizing *Native Son*. The theme of the novel is related to Green's deepest interest. Richard Wright came to Chapel Hill to work with Green, and much of the writing was done in the log-cabin study on Green's farm.

The ending of the play gave both authors a great deal of trouble. The last chapter of the novel consists of a long conversation between Bigger Thomas and his sympathetic Jewish lawyer, who

has failed to get him a reprieve. Through this conversation and through his previous association with the lawyer, Bigger approached an understanding of the complex pressures which had made him a murderer. The far-reaching implications packed into this chapter offered many difficulties to the playwrights. In the dramatic version, the conversation with the lawyer is greatly condensed, with a consequent increase in dramatic intensity. The scene closes with Bigger's "Death Lament" as he is led off to execution. Paul Green visited Death Row in the state prison in Raleigh, as he had many times before, to get atmosphere and understanding for this scene.

Native Son opened in New York in 1941, with every possible advantage of setting and interpretation. Orson Welles and John Houseman were the producers, and Canada Lee played the role of Bigger Thomas. The ten vivid scenes were presented without intermission, a method which contributed to the effect of mounting tension.

Brooks Atkinson again stressed Green's poetic gift:

> For Paul Green and Richard Wright, who wrote the stage version of "Native Son," are men of muscle, character and contrast, and they have written a forceful drama with thoughtful deliberation. Mr. Green is a North Carolina poet who is a philosopher, a man of religion and a defender of democracy. Mr. Wright is a Mississippi Negro who has lived and worked in the North; he is a realist, an atheist and a Communist. They are both interested in the welfare of the Negro race. They regard Mr. Wright's novel as a psychological document that helps to explain the corrosive effect of race prejudice. The novel, which was published last year, was shockingly violent in some of its scenes. The play is less horrific; some of the ghastly details of the original narrative have been eliminated or altered; the long defense of Bigger Thomas, the murderer, which dominated the last third of the novel, has also been sharply compressed.

Native Son had a successful run on Broadway in 1941 and was reopened for a run at popular prices in 1942.

XXIII. MORE MOVIES AND THE RADIO

During the early 1940's Paul Green spent much of his time in Hollywood, writing scripts for Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer. He bought a house in Santa Monica, where the family lived for several years. His eldest daughter, Nancy Byrd, was married there.

Green's later association with Hollywood and the making of films proved no more satisfactory to him as an artist than his first experiences had been. He spent considerable time in conference with Eddie Rickenbacker in preparation for writing a script based on Rickenbacker's war experiences, but later gave this up because he found it impossible to work with the producers. He also worked for a while on the script for *Adventure,* which was to feature Greer Garson and Clark Gable, but gave up in disgust. He wrote an original screen story about life in a Southern mill village, which gave him some personal satisfaction because he felt that he had made an honest presentation. MGM paid him handsomely for this, but rejected it for production as too realistic a deviation from the usual pattern. Thus all of his efforts to write sincerely (and he is incapable of writing otherwise) were turned down. In speaking of his experience with the films, he burst out, "The men who control the movies are menaces to civilization." And in a Raleigh talk in April 1947, he again expressed his disappointment:

> Now of all the machines which man has created for his own betterment and self-expression, none it seems to me is loaded with greater possibilities than the motion picture; here is an invention which is unlimited in its power for progress and good—for entertainment of the finest sort, for inspiration, glory, grandeur, whatever term you wish to use in describing human nature with its ideals, its vagaries and vanities. There is nothing like it and never has been before—not the radio, phonograph, newspaper, hardly books even—for its impact on the shaping of people's lives, their thinking, manners, customs and their deeds. . . .
>
> But are the movies fulfilling their potential greatness? Hardly. The manipulations of the moneymakers have led to a clever and scandalous exploitation of the public's human weaknesses and have flooded us with sensationalism, melodrama, novelty, glitter, froth and shine, thus forcing this mighty medium into a portrayal of our own country, for instance, as a land of excesses, of easy money, of poverty and crime, of gangsters and tough guys, of dull and ignorant politicians, of furred and empty-pated ladies, of cheap success, of hokum heroism, of easy sex, wastefulness, bad manners, and adolescent intelligence.

In a letter, Katherine Anne Porter spoke of meeting Paul Green in Hollywood, "of all places. The honest, tender and gifted soul stood out like a stalk of good sugar cane in a thicket of poison ivy."

Paul Green has also experimented with plays for radio. One of the first of these, *The Southern Cross,* published in 1938, deals with the power of the dead past, a theme not unlike that of *The House of Connelly,* and touches also upon the Confederate migration to Texas. Especially interesting because of its relation to *The Common Glory* is the radio play *The Critical Year: A One-Act Sketch of American History and the Beginning of the Constitution.* The action takes places in Boston ten years after the American Revolution is over, when Paul Revere and Daniel Shay decided to petition George Washington to take the lead in forming a strong central government. The author's concept here of the difficulties and agonies of the American Revolution is identical with that which he has developed more fully in *The Common Glory.*

In 1941 Paul Green collaborated with James Boyd in a series of radio plays designed "to give expression to their faith in American democracy." Green's contribution to this series was a script called "A Start in Life," which Canada Lee acted on the air; the story is virtually the same as that of his short story, "A Fine Wagon."

XXIV. A MATURING PHILOSOPHY

Paul Green's honest idealism, which cannot tolerate the debasement of the movies, found expression in the two volumes of essays published during the 1940's: *The Hawthorn Tree* and *Forever Growing*. *The Hawthorn Tree*, made up of sketches, many of which had previously appeared in *The Carolina Playbook*, *The Theatre Arts Magazine*, and *The New York Times*, contains much that is important for a thorough understanding of the author. The first essay, "Preface to Professors," emphasizes the fact that Green the dramatist and poet has remained also at heart the teacher. Here the ideas dramatized in *The Enchanted Maze* and expanded further in *Forever Growing* are given fuller expression: his conviction that college teaching often blunts and cheats the aspirations of the young:

> They wanted something to believe in, something to move their souls, to help them keep their drive and increase it, something to lift their faith in themselves and the human race and a universal and benignant rightness which men call God.
>
> . . . we professors, we keepers of wisdom . . . have lost our religion, our inspiration for living, and with us lies the responsibility most for what our young people are and may be.

These words gain significance when one recalls that they were written during World War II. The world conspicuously needs a new curriculum; the old ways of teaching have miserably failed to enable men to live together in peace, or even to live at all.

In these two volumes of essays are to be found Paul Green's ideas on art and life, his unshakable belief in man the artist and creator: "By the very nature of his being, man is a living soul and not an animal . . . he carries in his heart the divine imperative of the Maker's will from whence he came." Implicit here are his reasons for opposing capital punishment, and for his unstinted encouragement of creative effort in others. Art and religion are close together in Green's thinking; the eternal creative spirit in man is one manifestation of God.

Green's ideal of democracy is basically a religious one; he sees its goal as "the fashioning of an ever more perfect world in which all men should share." Here is the core of that American dream which he has dramatized explicitly in the four historical plays, but which underlies all of his work.

The essay on "Music in the Theatre" is the clearest statement to be found anywhere of what he has been working toward in his "symphonic dramas," and of his concept of music as an essential tool in dramatic creation.

In *Salvation on a String and Other Tales of the South* (1946) Green continued the story of the Little Bethel community. The setting and the characters have the warm feeling of familiarity for any one who has followed his writing; it enlivens the picture of a country neighborhood. The stories range in variety from the pathetic and at times the sentimental to the salty and humorous. In the story for which the volume is named, the ridiculous climax is built up with great skill, and the details of the country revival are vivid with the sharp clear colors of a Breughel painting. What might be told briefly as a bawdy yarn expands here into a complexly woven commentary on the folkways of a region. Many of these stories in their dramatic quality and the natural rhythms of the dialogue show the playwright's deftness. "Fine Wagon," the story with which the book closes, stands out as one of the most moving things that Paul Green has ever written. Without a word too much or too little, he brings to life a little Negro boy and indicates his inescapable future. As surely as in the first act of *In Abraham's Bosom*, the seeds of tragedy are seen to stir and sprout in this tender and flawless episode.

In Paul Green's most recent collection of short stories, *Dog on the Sun* (1949), the story of "Fine Waogn" is continued in "Sun Go Down." Here the reader experiences the humiliation of the

little boy, his realization of his parent's plight, and the foreshadowing of his father's death. Green is at his best here in the realistic, imaginative creation of a lonely child straying in the woods. Several of the stories in this volume are centered around a Southern university town. One of the most effective, "Education South," describes the funeral of a young Negro boy in a cemetery at the edge of the campus, as the singing of the Negro mourners causes one professor after another to close his classroom windows. "The Ghost in the Tree" moves subtly from a 'possum hunt in the present to a Civil War raid, and tells on two different planes the story of a white boy murdered long ago and the anguish of a Negro boy because his father has been electrocuted. The familiar themes of Green's writing are all present here: abhorrence of capital punishment, distrust of university education, sympathy for the hurt and the suffering and the unjustly treated. The title, from the country saying "Dog on the sun, fair weather soon gone," indicates the threat to civilization which, Green feels, issues from our social and economic injustices.

These prose writings of Paul Green's later years reflect a graver and less exuberant personality. He has tended to withdraw more and more from active social life, although his greeting for friends is as warm as ever. He has felt an increasing need for retirement and solitude, for concentration upon his work. Throughout his later writing he has evinced a deepening concern over the problems of man's fate and his relationship to God.

Now in his fifties, Paul Green still looks youthful, without a strand of gray in his thick dark hair. Whatever his reasons, there can be no question about the increasingly ascetic pattern of his life; he no longer needs the conviviality which he enjoyed in the twenties and early thirties. Yet in spite of this tendency to withdraw, he has always responded willingly to any call for help, whether it be literary, financial, political, or civic.

One of the diversions in which he has continued to participate

is the informal writers' group, which meets on Sunday nights in Chapel Hill for discussion and mutual criticism. This group, which has had a surprisingly long existence, has always been flexible and changeable and peripatetic, meeting at various places, but fairly frequently in the big library at the Greens' home. At one time or another it has included Betty Smith, Foster Fitz-Simmons, Josephina Niggli, Phillips and Caro Mae Russell, Clare Leighton, and Charles Mills, among others. Betty Smith once said that she might never have finished *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* without the constant prod of knowing that she must have something to read at the next gathering; for the only fixed rule was that each member must bring in something which he had written. At these meetings, Green showed himself an exacting critic, upholding high standards; at the same time his kindliness made him know how to soothe and restore a wounded author's ego if the going-over had been too rough. In later years this group changed character somewhat; instead of being as at first composed of struggling young writers, it included at least two authors of best-sellers, Betty Smith and James Street. Their presence, while probably stimulating, was also at times difficult and embarrassing for the less successful. Whenever the tensions inevitable in such a group effected an impasse, Green would plead earnestly and effectively for the circle's continuance. The project is very close to his heart because of his interest in helping others to release the creative impulses within them.

On February 9, 1949, the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress announced the awarding of the Bollingen Prize for Poetry to Ezra Pound for *The Pisan Cantos* as a work which "represents the highest achievement in American poetry." The Fellows, appointed by the Librarian of Congress, included besides Paul Green, such figures as Conrad Aiken, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Katherine Anne Porter, Karl Shapiro, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren. Violent protests from all over the country

immediately came in; for Pound had finished *The Pisan Cantos* at an Army prison camp in Italy, where he had been confined on an indictment of treason for broadcasting Fascist propaganda during World War II. The committee said it would not "permit other considerations than that of poetic achievement to sway the decision."

In the ensuing literary storm Paul Green was silent, and it was not until August that he finally admitted that he had not gone along with the other members of the committee when they had voted for Pound. Though personal attacks had been made on the committee personnel, Green refused to retaliate or to take part in the controversy. He telegraphed *The Saturday Review of Literature*: "I am not indignant about anything. I think the laugh is on us Fellows of the Library of Congress . . . . I am willing to let it go at that." And to Allen Tate he wrote: "The Fellows made a tactical mistake in awarding Pound a prize by way of a taxpayer's institution— if of no other sort—and there has been enough pother over it, and so let's get on to other matters."

Paul Green could scarcely be said to live in seclusion, since he is surrounded by a lively and extremely interesting family. Young Paul, after his discharge from the Navy, entered North Carolina State College at Raleigh, where he majored in physics, and then went on to graduate study in electrical engineering. He demonstrated his own share of the creative endowment of the family by inventing, while still a student, an automatic plotting machine, which saves much work in plotting mathematical solutions, and speeds research work in electrical engineering. He received his master's degree in 1948, and that same year married Dorrit Gegan of Boston. They made their home in Oxford, North Carolina, where Paul Junior worked with the State College Experiment Station in testing cured tobacco by the use of electronics, an interesting throwback, this, to his father's youthful experiment in

raising tobacco. Nancy Byrd and her husband, Sam Cornwell, lived in Chapel Hill during Sam's student days. Their baby, the first grandchild, was named for Elizabeth. Byrd continued her original work with the Carolina Modern Dance Group, in which her young sisters were also interested. Betsy had from early childhood shown that she had inherited the family talent for music, and continued her study of piano at the University of North Carolina and then at Oberlin College. Janet had already begun to write with ability and promise, and graduated from high school in 1949 as valedictorian of her class.

XXV. THE COMMON GLORY

When Paul Green visited Williamsburg, Virginia, in the summer of 1938, he immediately saw this restoration of an eighteenth-century town from a dramatist's point of view.

> I felt that the whole thing was made for some sort of living dramatic activity to be restored there. Here was architecture at its best. The past was here again in all details of housing, dressing, costumes, utensils, books, music, and the attendant trappings of a people once living but now dead and gone. But where were the people themselves? So why not a drama in which they could come to actual being on the stage and live out again some of the plans and purposes which once actuated them in this identical environment.
>
> So I talked to several people about the possibility of an outdoor play—the mayor, the representatives of the restoration, several members of the state government, historical societies, the antiquities group. Quite a lot of interest was shown. Tentative plans were got underway, some small amount of money was pledged—and I began thinking about the drama.

The Williamsburg play was originally announced for the summer of 1940, but the threat of war made it impossible to go ahead with the plans for building a theatre and financing the project. Green returned a sum of money which had been advanced to him

for expenses. But the idea of the play, the fascinating possibilities in the richness of Virginia history, remained to tempt his skill and to quicken his imagination.

In 1946, when it became possible again to consider the project, the Jamestown Corporation, heir of the earlier Virginia Peninsular Historical Association, was organized with Colgate Darden, now president of the University of Virginia, as one of the active sponsors. That summer Paul Green resumed his research and plans for the play. In the beginning he tried to build his story around the first Virginia colonists, John Smith, Pocahontas, John Rolfe, and their fellow adventurers in the New World, with the intention of presenting the play on the site of Jamestown. This plan had to be given up because of the swampy land of Jamestown Island; and its distance from any large town would have made far too costly the installation of adequate sewage. Thus for once, at least, literature was shaped by plumbing. In order to secure "modern conveniences" for cast and spectators, it was decided to build the theatre near Williamsburg, and the author changed his locale accordingly; thus Thomas Jefferson became his protagonist instead of, possibly, John Smith. In establishing a theatre in Williamsburg another eighteenth-century tradition was revived; as early as 1716 there had been a theatre near the old Capitol. George Washington witnessed there the first performance in this country of *The Beggar's Opera*, presented by actors and musicians from London; sometimes "young gentlemen of the college" appeared in such plays as Addison's *Cato* and *The Drummer*.

Paul Green at first attempted to plan a play in which the main characters would all be imaginary, and historical figures would move only on the outskirts of the drama, thus avoiding the complicated difficulties of putting well-known characters on the stage. But the compelling personality of Thomas Jefferson would not be denied:

> The more I have studied the works of this man the surer I am that he is one of the world's great figures. As few men have seen he saw a vision of righteousness, yes, just that, the righteous way of life, that would constitute the common glory of all men. We owe him more than any of us dream of. . . . It takes a wise people to measure up and be worthy of a wise man and Jefferson was just that. In my play I hope to interpret him in such a way that we will feel nearer to him and what he stood for. As one of his biographers said in listing his accomplishments, he was almost incredible. And that makes it tough for me, to try to dramatize the life and make credible the character of an almost incredible man. But I have great hopes to do it. For as a right hand ally in the endeavor is the noble and mystic art of music. With music the unbelievable, so inflooding and emotionalizing is its power, the unbelievable can be made believable.

Thus Green undertook the task of dramatizing familiar historical persons and events, a task which resulted in *The Common Glory*. When he was writing of Sir Walter Raleigh's lost colonists, he could give his imagination free play to create where little was known. And the characters in *The Highland Call*, although actual persons who had once lived in the Cape Fear region, were not so familiar to the audience as school book figures. But with historic personages as well known as Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin and the rest, his imagination had to be disciplined and controlled by fact. An added difficulty lay implicit in the cult of "Mr. Jefferson," perhaps not entirely peculiar to the State of Virginia, but certainly very strong there, making it practically an act of treason to tamper with the sacrosanct figure. Another limitation which the dramatist faced arose from the fact that it had been planned to invite school children from all over the State to the performances of the Williamsburg play; that is, it could not be in any sense a high-brow production. The author had to find, as the editor of *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* expressed it, "a common denominator interesting to the old and the young, the learned and the unlearned, the high school student from Hanover Courthouse and the visiting historian from Seattle." Within these well-defined limits, Paul Green went about

the research, the vast amount of reading which must precede the actual writing of such a play, and the planning of the scenes with their interpretation of history in words and dance and music.

Green not only wrote the play but took an active part in planning and designing the outdoor theatre which was built especially for it. The site selected for the theatre, on the Jamestown road not far from the College of William and Mary and the end of Duke of Gloucester Street, has unusual natural beauty. The amphitheatre slopes through a forest of century-old beeches and a lesser growth of hollies, tulip poplars and oaks, to the end of Lake Matoaka, which stretches behind the stage to darker forests beyond. The mighty trees stretch high above the stage and frame the play in a delicate baroque design of leaves and branches. These trees were very dear to Paul Green; he defended them against all the hazards of building, the designs of engineers and electricians. "But," he confided somewhat plaintively, "I have to watch them like a hawk. The minute I turn my back somebody goes and cuts down a tree." The roofless theatre is of Williamsburg brick in Georgian design. Two tall towers which contain the lighting equipment and the organ rise from the sides of the triple stage. The comfortable seats, the stage machinery, the dressing rooms, are all of the best. The author, remembering the primitive days of *The Lost Colony*, took great delight in exhibiting this elaborate perfection.

The money necessary to build the theatre and provide for the costly production was raised by the State of Virginia. No money from the Rockefeller-sponsored Williamsburg Corporation went into it; quotas were assigned to different cities and towns, and the entire State cooperated in this celebration of Virginia's heritage. In this sense, *The Common Glory* is even more definitely a statewide enterprise than *The Lost Colony*.

The Common Glory had its première on July 17, 1947. The first night was heralded with considerable fanfare; special trains

brought officers of the Commonwealth and various notables, among them Governor William Munford Tuck, former Governor Colgate Darden, and Lady Astor, born Nancy Langhorne of Mirador in Jefferson's own county of Albemarle.

The author's own word, given to the press on the day of the opening, make clear his purpose:

> I hope that all who see this Virginia historical drama will be encouraged to believe more and more in the great American dream, which is not a vision of one nation as opposed to another, or one people precedent over another people, but a vision of the Common Glory, common to all men, freedom, justice, and a righteous society of men and brothers all over the world.

As in the case of *The Lost Colony*, Green considered the early performances of *The Common Glory* a rough draft which he would revise many times. Watching the play constantly from various parts of the theatre, he observed weaknesses and began at once to make changes. The intimate scenes, such as the dialogue between Jefferson and his wife on Christmas Eve, worried him especially. He realized that such episodes, although they sounded well on paper and even in rehearsal, did not go over to a large audience in such a big amphitheatre, and later they were omitted. After a few nights, the scene at the burial ground at Monticello was also taken out, and two deeply moving pantomimes, the digging squad of Negro slaves and the procession of the wounded and the sorrowing, had been added; neither of these appeared on the first printed programs. In spite, however, of this somewhat fluid and uneven state, *The Common Glory* in its first summer was immensely successful. The synthesis of music, light, color, dances, words, pantomime and action, toward which the author had been moving in other plays, seemed here in great measure to have been achieved. The splendid tones of the organ, the soaring young voices of the William and Mary choir, the melodies of dance tunes, of battle songs, the solemn anthems of the Anglican liturgy,

the gay colors of eighteenth-century costumes, and the moving poetry, wove together a genuine enchantment.

Jefferson's personality had many facets; Green chose to present him a young man bowed down with sorrows and responsibilities, his heart torn with grief over the illness of his wife, his spirit heavy with the burdens of governorship, the threat of impeachment, the agonies of the Revolution. The author emphasized not only Jefferson's personal suffering, but the bitter cost in human pain of establishing the new nation. The ending of the play had a fine suggestiveness, with the Virginia pioneers ready to set out from Richmond for the beginning of their long journey to the Blue Ridge and beyond.

The play was not, however, all solemn. The comic characters, Cephus Sicklemore and Mammy Huzzit, were well imagined and well integrated into the body of the drama by Cephus' reluctant enlistment and service in the Continental Army. And there were many moments of tenderness, lively color and gaiety, such as the minuet at King George's court, dancing on the green at Williamsburg, the romance between the pretty Tory, Eileen Gordon, and the young Revolutionary officer, Hugh Taylor.

The stage directions for *The Common Glory* indicated clearly that the author thought of both light and music as allies, even as actors, in the total harmony which he was creating. He personified the organ in such directions as "comment from the organ," and endowed it with separate creative ability in "A low humming begins in the chorus, joined later by a soft but high and shimmering harmony of the organ in the treble clef, a shimmering like bright luminous wings beating in the air. A pulse beat is sounded in the organ." Some musicians criticized Green's taste in his choice of the electric organ to accompany his historical plays. This choice had a practical side, since only such an organ could produce sufficient volume to carry in a large outdoor amphitheatre. The organ had the sustaining and the longest role in the play.

No original music was composed for *The Common Glory*. In searching for appropriate music, Green went through many collections of English and Scottish carols, songs, ballads, and marching tunes. He selected some six hundred airs, from which the music in its final form was adapted. The score, partly martial and patriotic, more often liturgical, contributed to the emotional effect of the drama. In Green's choice of music, as in his historical characters, he ventured to use the familiar and even hackneyed, and by his poetic touch to endow these with fresh grace.

All audiences have enjoyed *The Common Glory*. One of the best indices of this is that during the first summer they increased steadily, averaging about 1800 a night. According to the original plan of the sponsors, several hundred school children saw each performance. When the run ended, the management estimated that approximately 90,000 people had seen the play.

There were inevitable mutterings of criticism and displeasure, especially directed toward the dramatist's interpretation of the personality of Thomas Jefferson. One stalwart Virginia lady was heard to mutter as she left the amphitheatre: "The very idea . . . putting words in Mr. Jefferson's mouth he never would have said." This referred to Jefferson's wish to write into the Declaration of Independence a clause which would free the slaves. Historical evidence supports this passage which had displeased the lady. Green had not been able to perform the miracle of giving Virginians their favorite son just exactly as each of them imagined him, but he had succeeded in delighting a great many people. An initial criticism that the play lacked an important climax was later met by lengthening the speeches of Patrick Henry and Jefferson on the bluffs at Richmond and by underscoring with music and lighting effects the meaning of these speeches. Here, in Jefferson's words, as in his personality throughout, the author chose to stress responsibility, sacrifice, sufferings, and struggle. Here is no facile jingoism, no Fourth of July flag-waving; here is instead

an austere and stately declaration of the new nation's responsibility toward the rest of mankind.

This dramatization of sophisticated and wealthy intellectuals of eighteenth-century Virginia may seem a long way from the scenes and characters of Paul Green's early work. Yet in a sense it is also an expression and summation of all that he had thought and passionately believed. Through the personality of Thomas Jefferson, and through a declaration of the ideals for which the American Revolution was fought he made a moving statement of his own convictions. Here are, vigorously asserted, the underlying themes of all his writing: Man's right to freedom, to equality of opportunity; the power of righteousness; the need for a moral direction and purpose in life. Here is his championship not only of the Negro, but of all oppressed minorities. And here in utter sincerity is that religious conviction which grew steadily as his philosophy matured.

XXVI. FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

The fourth of Green's symphonic dramas to express the evolution of the American dream was surely the most difficult task which the dramatist had yet faced. Far more so even than Jefferson, the figure of George Washington was one long since cast into bronze, as cold as the sharp outlines of the famous monument which bears his name. To breathe actual life into the hero who had been the cherry-tree-chopping lad of the Grant Wood picture, the Gilbert Stuart portrait of the postage stamp, and the marble demigod of public parks and government buildings was a prospect which would have defeated a lesser dramatist. Yet in George Washington, Paul Green saw the American dream reaching toward its consummation. *The Lost Colony* had told of its

beginnings, *The Highland Call* of its struggles, *The Common Glory* of its realistic foundation, and now *Faith of Our Fathers* would tell of its initial victory.

The opportunity for Green to write the play began in 1947 when Congress authorized a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the City of Washington as the seat of the federal government. The occasion was to be signaled in 1950 by a variety of events to be planned by the Sesquicentennial Commission. In 1948 Green arrived in Washington and agreed to write a play on the character of George Washington if a suitable outdoor theatre should be provided. The following year President Truman met with the Commission, and it was decided to erect such a theatre near the heart of the city on a site in Rock Creek Park previously chosen by Green and Commission Director Edward Boykin. Six months later Congress appropriated the money, and in December groundbreaking exercises were held. Since more than three months passed in clearing the forest and grading the site, construction of the theatre was delayed till April 1950, only a hundred days before the planned opening. Actually it was not until August that *Faith of Our Fathers* finally reached the stage.

Meanwhile the dramatist and his co-workers had been furiously busy. As Green first saw the new drama, it was to be based on five days in the life of George Washington with tentative title "The Merciless Days." The playwright read countless books on the First President, went through tomes of his correspondence. In Boston, New York, and Washington he perused stacks of original manuscripts in the archives. He visited West Point, Valley Forge, Philadelphia, Annapolis, and other spots associated with his subject. He was determined that this was to be no pageant. "Pageants deal with subject matter and therefore do not have a story line, while drama has a sound story line." Green's very first thought was to portray Washington "as a warm-blooded human being, as he must have been before the biographers and historians

got hold of him. He was a moulder of the future, vibrant and alive." As the writing progressed, Green decided to abandon the five-days story and to place Washington against a background of those difficult years from 1783 to 1799. But he was determined that the human figure should stand out from the confusion of those conflicting years of our early national life. He wrote:

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

The play opens on a winter day in Annapolis in 1783 when Washington returned to the Continental Congress his commission as general of the Revolutionary Army. Then come scenes which illustrate the troubled years which followed, and show the continuing reliance of the struggling republic on Washington for leadership. His acceptance of this leadership, his selection as president, and the tribulations of those years as the Father of His Country till shortly before his death conclude the play. Through it all there shines forth a man who loved his home and family—a man of political astuteness in dealing with men of such divergent but honest views as Jefferson and Hamilton and with Patrick Henry and Isaac Bell—a man who kept his country from further wars—a man of high moral fortitude. The playwright makes it clear that only with a leader of such justice and courage could the young nation have survived in a hostile world.

To relieve the high seriousness of such a portrayal, Green employs as his comic character Washington's own body servant and general factotum, Billy Lee. This is a departure from the humorous inventions of the first three historical regional dramas, Old Tom, Sandy Ochiltree, and Cephus Sicklemore. Billy Lee is made to order, for as a necessary personage, the dramatist could utilize

his rich Negro humor as a contrast to those sometimes almost overwhelming national issues. For romantic interest, Green plays up the love between Lucy Bridgers, a young relative of the Washingtons, and Frederick Bell, son of one of Washington's most irritating opponents.

Paul Green wrote as his subtitle, "A Symphonic Drama with Music and Dance, Produced by the National Capital Sesquicentennial Commission, and Based on George Washington's Part in Founding the American Republic and Lauching the Young Nation on Its Career." The words *music* and *dance* are significant, for they make important Green's word *symphonic*. Pantomime and poetry are present too—and costumes and staging and lighting—and the whole is a workmanlike fusion of all the accouterments of the theatre.

An interesting sidelight to Green's preparation of the play for production is the difficulty which he had in choosing a name for it. He had been jotting down possible titles for some time, had in fact collected over a hundred. One evening he stumbled on a century-old hymn with words accredited to an English clergyman, Frederick W. Faber.

> Faith of our fathers! Living still
> In spite of dungeons, fire and sword
> Oh how our hearts beat high with joy
> Whene'er we hear that glorious word!
> Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
> We will be true to Thee till death.

He wrote:

> Those words at once ended my search. They are so appropriate to the inner conflict of a troubled young nation that was led to victory by the faith of one resolute man. The very title summons up visions of a long line of patriots who have stood fast through fiery trials, through storm and strife, through battles and crises, who have laid down their lives, poured out their blood, and kept the

faith, that George Washington's dream of a free United America might come true.

By the end of May 1950 the script had been completed, and the enormous task of selecting personnel for the production was underway. Except for several professional actors, the large cast was drawn primarily from amateurs in and around Washington and from members of drama classes in the near-by universities. Rehearals began before the theatre was finished, though busy workmen speeded toward the deadline. Opening night was set for August 4.

A brilliant first-night audience of over 4,000 was on hand, including President and Mrs. Harry Truman and daughter Margaret, Washington representatives of diplomatic, military, and government agencies, and hundreds of North Carolinians who went up especially for the occasion. It was their first view of an open-air theatre which is undoubtedly the finest in the country. Built at a cost of over half a million, with 4,059 seats, and a triple stage 158 feet wide, an orchestra pit for 60 musicians, and a stage-area to accommodate 250 actors, it was indeed a tremendous contribution to the cultural life of the national capital. The Commission had spent almost $100,000 in mounting the play, the 400 costumes alone costing approximately $22,000. As the thousands of first-nighters sat in the forest auditorium surrounded by trees with dark blue skies overhead scattered with stars, Paul Green suddenly heard the first note of the organ, saw the dimming of the lights, and glanced to the left where two narrators, a young man and a young woman, rose to start the telling of his new chapter in the story of the American dream:

> In these woods and among these Potomac hills the men of the Republic once walked and rode and made their plans—dreaming of a great Federal City which some day should be—the capital of a mighty nation. And out of their dreaming more than a hundred and fifty years ago this city has come to pass.

The following morning the newspaper critics were kind and sympathetic, but they were not sure that Green had accomplished completely the task which he had set himself to do. It was, however, something almost naively patriotic, something intensely religious, something magnificantly poetic, which they had seen. As they sat at their typewriters, with their consciences even then well aware of the fighting not two months old in distant Korea for those things in which our Founding Fathers believed, they knew they had seen the ultimate victory of the dream which is Paul Green's and every true American's.

In *The New York Times* Brooks Atkinson wrote with sincerity:

> But the things I like most in Mr. Green's drama are fleeting suggestions here and there that in our years of destiny men thought that the country was going to the dogs, that taxes were ruinous, the Government bankrupt and all politicians either fools or crooks. To give "Faith of Our Fathers" depth and significance Mr. Green might go a little further into the natural bewilderment and anxieties of the revered men who succeeded in getting us started. They had to make courageous decisions that have affected the long life of the nation. They had to put a practical foundation under the idealism of the charter.

XXVII. CONCLUSION

The planning and writing of historical regional dramas has continued to absorb Paul Green's energies and gifts. "Hardly a day goes by," he says, "that I don't get a letter from some section of the United States asking me to come and write a symphonic drama and help build a theatre to stage it in." The development of this movement gives him great satisfaction, since he feels it approaches that people's theatre which he has always desired to see established in this country. "The true theatre must live among the people," not bottled up in "the hollow haunts of Broadway." The cooperative community nature of the Manteo, Williamsburg, and Wash-

ington dramas, the cheapness of admission to these spectacles, the vast numbers of people who have enjoyed them—all are representative of what he would like to see in a genuine grassroots nationwide theatre.

He has travelled a great deal in California looking for the ideal site for a future symphonic drama of the West. The beauty and the colorful and pious history of the Spanish missions has attracted him powerfully as a theme. "The days of those old monks," he muses, "moved to the rhythm of prayer. Everything they did, waking and sleeping, cooking and eating, planting and harvesting, was a religious rite . . . ." The Ojai Valley appeals to him as probably the best place for building a great outdoor theatre "under the dry and rainless stars."

In his own state Green helped to select a site outside of Fayetteville and near Fort Bragg for the erection of an outdoor theatre in which productions of *The Highland Call* could be resumed. The intention of the community was to make of this an annual celebration of the Scottish settlements in the Cape Fear Valley.

Fortunately, no conclusion to this biography can be written. Paul Green's work is still very much in progress. A man of abundant energy and vitality, he has a rich store of as yet unrealized dreams and ideas. His 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.

From a point of view so near to a living writer, it is impossible to say whether or not his books will supply that lack which Paul Green himself deplored in 1928 when he said: "North Carolina has made no lasting contribution to the art of the world." Even with a consideration of the towering figure of Thomas Wolfe, who burst upon the scene in 1929, it is possible, looking back on

the body of Green's work, to say that Green has "with high-minded and intelligent devotion" recorded the lives of his fellow countrymen. He has been one of the most faithful and the most illuminating interpreters of the rural life of North Carolina, and through his intimate knowledge and understanding of one locality has been able to interpret also the South. Good sense and good judgment have made him willing to confine his writing to the area of his own observation and knowledge; imagination of heart and brain has enabled him to progress from that simple area to larger concern with the fundamental problems of mankind. Passion for justice for the Negro and the sharecropper led in his thinking to a passion for justice for all humanity, a belief in democracy as a way of human righteousness. The social and economic problems of Harnett County grew, in the historical plays, into the problems of the young United States, and by implication, of all human kind. Proff Koch used to admonish his students to "Cast down your nets where you are." Paul Green took that admonition to heart, and in the familiar and the near-at-hand he has found universality.

As an interpreter of the South, Green has followed an individual as well as a thoroughly sincere course. He has avoided the romanticism and sentimentality which he so vigorously condemned in his first manifesto as editor of *The Reviewer*. He has also to a large extent avoided that Gothic quality in Southern writing which appears in the gargoyles and grotesques of realists such as Caldwell and Faulkner. That this has not always been true of Green's work is illustrated by at least one macabre story about the man who cheated the buzzards, and by his occasional preoccupation with death. It probably cost him something to cut that burial scene from *The Common Glory*. But on the whole his picture of the South as he knows it has been free of romantic embroidery and extravagances. In the steadiness and balance with which he has regarded the scene from his own angle of vision, he is not unlike

that otherwise so different novelist, Ellen Glasgow. He lacks her irony, and the scenes which he depicts are farther from Richmond in spiritual climate than in actual geography; but the temper of observation, the sure knowledge of the familiar, the compassionate understanding, the lack of distortion, are similar in tone. For the most part, Green has been able to describe his section of the South without getting too excited about it, without creating angels and devils in a realm of fantasy. Perhaps in some plays, notably *Tread the Green Grass* and *Shroud My Body Down,* he has succumbed to the Southern impulse toward the ornate and the strange; but the main body of his published work concerns a very real segment of the rural South, described with honesty and sanity. His South is one of potential abundance of wasted and eroded land, of cruel injustice and of true neighborliness, of laughter and music and tragedy and courage and futility and aspiration; in short, a region peopled by human beings instead of by social and economic charts and ciphers and statistics, or by unrecognizable grotesques.

The mood of his generation, and his own intrinsic sincerity, determined that Green should write realistically. The poet that he naturally is, however, has almost always been dominant. This combination of poetry and realism forms part of the individual quality not only of his interpretation of the South, but of his work as a whole. Abraham McCranie inhabits a harshly realistic world of denial and deprivation and crime; yet his dreams and aspiration, his passion and his torture, are illuminated with poetry. In *The Common Glory,* the American Revolution moves forward in all the reality of human pain, but beyond this reality the author's deep understanding of heroic idealism lifts and shapes the play into a poetic whole. It is a matter for speculation whether or not in a different literary climate from the realistic one of the United States in the 1920's and 1930's Paul Green might have written

only poetry and poetic drama; it is a matter for gratitude that the pull toward realism never overwhelmed the poet.

Poetry inheres not only in the lyrics of his plays, not only in the quick response to beauty of all sorts, but most essentially in his concern with noble issues and basic truths. He has never let himself be drawn into writing meretriciously; he has never denied his dedication to man's long climb toward righteousness, his profound convictions of justice and injustice, right and wrong. In spite of his association with Hollywood, he has never written with one eye on a possible sale to the movies; he has steadily and consistently written what he believes with all the vigor of a sincere and honest man.

Unlike most writers, Paul Green has written no book which can be interpreted as autobiographical, although there are such passages, notably in *This Body The Earth.* In spite of the fact that he is introspective to a degree, his creative energies have been turned outward; he has used his own experiences, obviously, but always to create characters other than himself. In all of his plays, novels, and essays no one character can be singled out as the author himself, in the sense that Eugene Gant and George Webber are both Thomas Wolfe. Green has not yet told us, from within himself, what it was like to be a young poet growing up on a North Carolina farm in the years before World War I, nor how he saw France and Belgium and the Western Front, nor what he experienced as a mature and somewhat aloof student at the State University, nor what his early successes, his continuing efforts as a writer, with outward recognition balancing inner dissatisfaction, have meant to him. Perhaps the clues to his personality must always be sought, as his present biographer has done, through suggestions in his published work.

From the early folk plays of his Playmaker days, to the developing and expanding regional dramatic productions typified

by the symphonic dramas, Paul Green has remained true to his purpose and his ambition to write plays about the people and for the people, to be produced not by commercial backing, but with the design of bringing music and poetry and color and drama within easy reach of people in communities far from Broadway. In this movement he has been an innovator. He has also pioneered in the combination of music and drama in a closely interwoven form. He has always suggested and pointed the way toward greater harmonies of interpretation.

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