IN REVISITING THE TRANSCRIPT OF AN interview conducted almost a half-century ago, I am struck by the graciousness and kindness of a man I met only one time. I am also struck by the naïveté and contradictions of myself as interviewer, this pretentious radical-leftist-conservative young patriot. Paul Green would never know how great an influence he had over how I would choose to conduct my life and the things I would find to be important in it.

Under the guidance of the distinguished Charles Davis, Princeton’s first African American professor and my academic advisor, I had determined in the spring of 1960 that I would write my undergraduate senior thesis on the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paul Green. I knew him as the author of *The Lost Colony*, which I had been enjoying every summer on the Outer Banks of North Carolina since I was nine years old. So I read a few more of his plays, spent the following summer visiting several outdoor dramas, and knocked on the Greens’ door in Chapel Hill on the evening of August 26, 1960.

“(WHAT) THE AMERICAN PUBLIC NEEDS”: A “THEATER OF THE PEOPLE”
In re-reading the interview in 2009, I recall that there was one small piece missing from our conversation. As the interview concluded, we paused at his front door, and he asked me what I was going to do with my life and if I had ever tried to write any plays myself. “No,” I replied, and stumbled on about how I wasn’t really up to the task, how theater and drama were sideline interests of mine only, a “frivolous interest” as defined by my parents. No, I planned on going into international diplomacy or some such profession that might earn me a decent living. He nodded, smiled knowingly, and wished me well.

After graduating from Princeton, I went on to get a master’s degree in International Education from Columbia and then became a high school English teacher in New England. I quickly took up teaching drama and directing plays, acting in a few along the way, and subsequently I enjoyed a long and rewarding career in theater education.

And then, finally, I began to write my own plays. All too belatedly, Thank you, Paul Green.1

PAUL GREEN: Well, where would you like to begin? I guess you’ve had quite a trip by now, haven’t you? You must be getting pretty fed up with driving.

WILLIAM HOWARD ROUGH: It surely has been a fine trip, but I’ve been lucky on the driving. I left Washington just a week ago this morning and drove straight to Winston-Salem. I met a friend there, left my car in a garage, and we drove the rest in his little Morris. I guess he didn’t trust my driving because he did most of it, and I can’t say I really minded.

Now just what plays did you finally get to see?