

BY KELLY VINES

A Drama of Class AND Race:

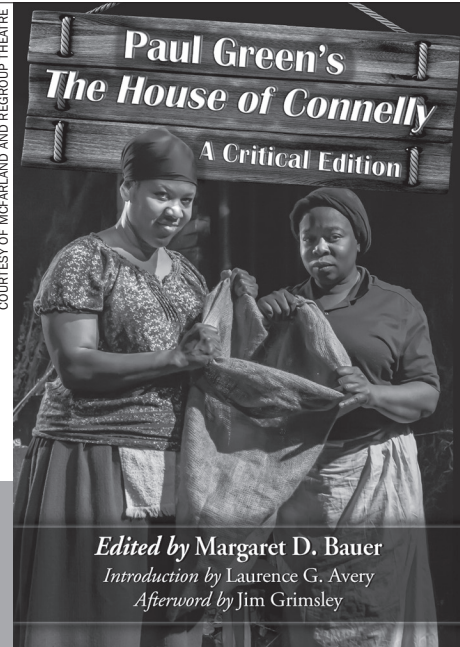
Southern Progressivism in Paul Green's
The House of Connelly

When the Group Theatre in New York City began rehearsing *The House of Connelly* by North Carolina playwright Paul Green in 1931, the directors pushed back against the ending Green had initially written. Green's play, as originally written, featured two black sharecroppers, Big Sis and Big Sue, murdering Patsy Tate, a (former) white sharecropper who moves up in the world by marrying Will Connelly, the heir to a declining Southern plantation. According to Margaret D. Bauer, the Group Theatre "wanted poor white Patsy to be successful in breaking through class barriers, to be rewarded for her willingness to work hard for land that Will Connelly had inherited rather than earned."¹ Ultimately, Green changed the play's ending to spare Patsy's life, and the two black women acquiesce to Patsy's stern "leadership" within the Connelly home. In a letter to Cheryl Crawford many years later, Green suggests that "the young Group members were taken with the communist ideology" and "out of this fervor of conviction . . . a decision was made to change the ending of the *Connelly* play to – in Harold Clurman's words – to a yea-saying statement instead of a nay-saying one."²

¹ Margaret D. Bauer, "Paul Green's *The House of Connelly*, a Play (and Playwright) 'worth bothering about': A Scene-by-Scene Analysis," *Paul Green's The House of Connelly*, ed. Margaret D. Bauer (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014) 130; subsequently cited parenthetically. Quotations from the play will also be cited from this edition, which includes both endings.

² Paul Green, Letter to Cheryl Crawford, 22 Apr. 1975, in Laurence G. Avery, ed., *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916–1981* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1994) 680; subsequently cited parenthetically.

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In April 2016, this essay received Louisiana State University's Gale Carrithers Outstanding Critical Essay Award, which is given annually for the best essay written by a graduate student in English to honor the memory of Professor Gale Carrithers, a former chair and esteemed Renaissance scholar "who mentored graduate students with great care."