The Green Pastures Study Guide

The Green Pastures by Marc Connelly

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Introduction

The Green Pastures, the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Marc Connelly, is a reenactment of stories of the Old Testament in which all the characters (including God) are African American and speak in a black southern dialect. The play was first performed at the Mansfield Theatre in New York City in 1930. Connelly attributes his idea for the play to the retelling of Old Testament stories in Roark Bradford's book *Southern Sketches, "Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun."*

The Green Pastures follows stories of the Bible, such as Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Moses and the exodus from Egypt, and the crucifixion of Christ, but places them in a rural black southern setting. Thus, one of the opening scenes takes place at a "fish fry" in "pre-Creation Heaven," during which God spontaneously decides to create Earth and man. God eats boiled pudding, smokes cigars, and runs Heaven out of a shabby "private office" assisted by Gabriel. The settings are roughly contemporary to the time period in which the play was first written and performed, so that, for instance, the city of Babylon is represented as a New Orleans jazz nightclub. The costumes are also contemporary: God wears a white suit and white tie, Adam is dressed in a farmer's clothes, Eve wears the gingham dress of a country girl, and so on. The play ends with God's decision, while back at the fish fry in Heaven, to send Jesus Christ down to Earth.

Connelly's play was unusual at the time of its initial production in that it featured a cast made up exclusively of African-American actors. Connelly's portrayal of African Americans as "simple" people, particularly as created by a white playwright, will likely strike today's reader as stereotyped.

Author Biography

Marcus Cook Connelly was born on December 13, 1890, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. His father, Patrick Joseph Connelly, was an actor and hotel owner, while his mother, Mabel Louise (maiden name Cook), was an actress.

From 1902 until 1907, Connelly attended Trinity Hall, a private school in Washington, Pennsylvania. From 1908 until 1915, he was a reporter and drama critic for several Pittsburgh newspapers. He then moved to New York, working as a newspaper journalist and freelance writer from 1916 until 1920.

Connelly became a prominent member of the "Vicious Circle" of the Algonquin Round Table, an informal group of sharp-witted writers, editors, actors, and intellectuals who met regularly at the Algonquin Hotel. In 1925, he was named to the editorial board of *New Yorker* magazine. In 1929, he wrote *The Green Pastures*, his most celebrated work, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1930. In the same year, *Collier's* magazine published his short story *"Coroner's Inquest,"* which won an O. Henry Award, and on the personal front, Connelly married screen actress Madeline Hurlock. She divorced him in 1935.

From 1933 until 1944, Connelly moved between New York and Hollywood, writing both stage plays and screenplays. He wrote and directed the screen adaptation of *The Green Pastures* in 1936. From 1946 until 1950, he was professor of playwriting at Yale University.

Connelly held several posts in cultural organizations, including United States Commissioner to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (appointed in 1951); and President of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (in 1953). His autobiographical work, *Voices Off-Stage: A Book of Memoirs*, was published in 1968. Connelly died in New York City on December 21, 1980.

Plot Summary

Part I

Part I In Part I, Scene I of *The Green Pastures*, Reverend Deshee teaches Sunday school to a group of children in a Louisiana town. He explains the first five chapters of Genesis, after which the children ask him questions.

Scene II takes place at a fish fry in pre-Creation Heaven. The fish fry is attended by angels of all ages. An Archangel arrives and hands out diplomas to all of the children. Then Gabriel arrives, followed by God. After tasting the boiled custard, God decides that the recipe needs more "firmament" to taste right. To produce more firmament for the custard, God performs a miracle. There is so much firmament, however, that it starts to rain down on the fish fry. God creates Earth to drain off the excess firmament. God then creates man to farm the earth.

Scene III takes place on the newly formed Earth, where Adam is alone. God tells Adam that he needs a family; he tells Adam to lie down while he creates Eve. Adam and Eve taste the fruit of the tree God has forbidden them to harvest and are kicked out of the Garden of Eden, after which they have two sons, Cain and Abel.

In Scene IV, God descends upon Earth to find that Cain has just killed Abel by hitting him with a stone, because, he says, Abel was making a "fool" of him while he worked in the field. God tells Cain that he has committed a "crime" and orders him to go as far away as possible.

In Scene V, Cain stops by the side of a country road, where he meets a young woman. She agrees to be Cain's Girl, and takes him home to find lodging at her father's house.

Scene VI takes place in "God's private office in Heaven." God comments to Gabriel that he hasn't walked the earth for several hundred years, and decides to see how things are going.

Scene VII takes place on Earth on a Sunday. God finds the people engaged in gambling and debauchery, few of them attending church. Noah, a country preacher, comes along, and God walks with him. Noah, thinking God is also a preacher, tells him of the general lack of faith among the people. Noah invites God home for dinner with his wife.

Scene VIII takes place in the home of Noah and his wife. While there, God draws up a plan for Noah to build an ark, warning him that He will be sending a flood to drown all the people, who are full of sin, except Noah and his family.

In Scene IX, Noah and his sons build the ark while their neighbors look on, jeering at Noah and calling him crazy. Cain the Sixth kills Flatfoot with a knife for flirting with his girlfriend. As the rain comes, Noah and his sons begin to load the animals onto the ark.

In Scene X, the ark finally finds dry land, where Noah and his family release the animals and plant seeds. God appears to admire the new world he has created and to congratulate Noah on his success. Gabriel, who accompanies God, is less enthusiastic.

Part II

Part II, Scene I takes place in God's office. God is once again unhappy with the abundance of sin among human beings. He calls Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into his office and informs them that he has chosen one of their descendants, Moses, to lead his people to the Promised Land of Canaan, which God has set aside especially for them.

In Scene II, God speaks to Moses, explaining the task for which he has been chosen. Moses is not convinced that he is hearing the voice of God until God first sets a bush on fire and then turns a rod into a snake.

Scene III takes place in the throne room of the Pharaoh, who is being entertained by a magician. Moses and his brother Aaron arrive and demand that Pharaoh release their people from bondage in Egypt. The Pharaoh refuses, and Moses (with the help of God) causes a swarm of gnats, and then a swarm of flies, to descend upon the Pharaoh's court. He tells the Pharaoh he will not call off the pests unless the Pharaoh agrees to let his people go. Pharaoh tricks Moses several times, but does not truly agree to release the people until his dead son is brought in to him.

In Scene IV, Moses, Aaron, and their people have been wandering in the desert for forty years. They have come to the river Jordan, where Moses finds that he is too old and sick to enter the Promised Land of Canaan with the others. He appoints Joshua to lead them in battle for the city of Jericho. God comes to Moses and shows him that his people have won the battle and entered Jericho. God then leads Moses to Heaven.

Scene V takes place in Babylon, where the people, who are full of sin and without faith, attend a wild party in what looks like a New Orleans jazz nightclub. Even the King and the High Priest are corrupt and sinful. A Prophet arrives, but is shot dead by the Master of Ceremonies. God is so angered by this that he renounces his people and vows to abandon them.

Scene VI takes place in God's office, where He decides to go down to Earth one more time.

Scene VII takes place at the Temple of Jerusalem, where a battle has been fought. God appears to Hezdrel and questions him about his faith and the faith of the people. Hezdrel says that they worship a "new" God, the "God of Hosea," rather than the "God of Moses." Hezdrel explains that the "old" God was full of "wrath and vengeance," whereas the "God of Hosea" is full of "mercy."

Scene VIII takes place once again at the fish fry in Heaven, where God gets the idea to send a "God who must suffer" down to Earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

Part 1, Scene 1

Part 1, Scene 1 Summary

The setting is an African American church in Louisiana in the 1920s. Elderly Preacher Deshee is teaching Sunday school by reading the Bible to ten children with varying attention levels and vivid imaginations. He explains the first five chapters of the Old Testament by reading the life spans of Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Methuselah, and mentioning Noah. The children pester Preacher Deshee with questions. Carlisle wants to know why God created the world as it is; what Heaven is like and what God looks like. Preacher Deshee explains that God looks like a distinguished African American preacher. He begins to read from Genesis. The children imagine the scenes from this play as he reads.

Part 1, Scene 1 Analysis

This play is a fable, a brief story illustrating a moral. It innovatively presents God, the angels and all the actors as African Americans with Louisiana dialects from the 1920s, when the play is written. This factor makes the play seem more dated to us than if it had been written without it. The play is a comedy.

The play indirectly asks, "What if God were African American and created other African American people to populate the earth?" It also portrays the faith of ordinary working African American people living in the deep South of the 1920s, and it intermingles legends, myths, hymns, actual places, common images and scenes from their everyday lives. The title of the play could refer to the 23rd Psalm or the green pastures of Heaven or of earth. God remains a male authority figure, which is a familiar picture of God to the children and many people today..

Part 1, Scene 2

Part 1, Scene 2 Summary

The setting is a fish fry in Heaven before the creation of Earth. African American winged angels of all sexes and ages are frying catfish, baking biscuits and corn bread, and making boiled custard to drink. A choir sings old hymns, mostly unknown to the reader today, in the background. The cherubs, children of the adult angels, constantly misbehave and grow up to join the holy angel choir at the throne of grace. Heaven is "everywhere," except where Satan is, which is not known, and includes a lake where the men catch catfish. An unnamed imposing Archangel enters and passes out Sunday school graduation cards to the cherubs. The Archangel Gabriel enters. He is bigger and more elaborately winged than any other but younger and beardless. Gabriel raises his hand and announces the entrance of the Lord God Jehovah. God is the tallest and biggest of the actors. He wears a white shirt, white bow tie, a long Prince Albert coat of African American alpaca, African American trousers and congress gaiters, which are leather leggings or high topped fancy shoes. He speaks in a rich, bass voice as he asks the assembled angels, "Is you been baptized?" An angel gives God a cup of boiled custard and a ten-cent cigar. God decides the custard needs more seasoning – a whole mess of firmament, or rain. The cherubs get soaked and the angels complain about the amount of firmament. God does not want to ruin the fish fry and creates the Earth with mountains, valleys, oceans, lakes and the Sun to dry off the angels and their wings. God leaves Gabriel in charge while he goes to earth to create man.

Part 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The scene and context in which Heaven, God and the angels are presented are familiar in the South, where fish fries and community gatherings are as common as ten cent cigars. Boiled custard is an old Southern tradition requiring a double boiler and a special recipe. The clothing described is that of Louisiana in the 1920s, with Heaven's ranks illustrated by size and clothing. The chattering of the angels and the playfulness of the cherubs are cheerful and amusing, and make Heaven a believable and friendly place. It is easy to visualize the children imagining this scene.

The Biblical metaphors or allusions in this scene are out of place. The fish fry with bread is similar to Jesus' story of feeding the crowd with limited loaves and fishes. The tradition of Baptism also began in the New Testament. The Bible and other legends indicate that angels do not age or have identifiable sexes. There is no understandable connection between a cup of boiled custard and the need for water in it, except that God created the Earth to get rid of all that extra water he called "firmament." However, the scene is clever and imaginative.

Part 1, Scene 3

Part 1, Scene 3 Summary

The scene begins with a puzzled Adam, described as 30 years of age, medium height, dressed as an average field hand and surrounded by Louisiana greenery. He stretches his newly made muscles and is delighted with life and the trilling of the birds. God approaches Adam, who is very happy with his *new* line of work. God explains that Adam needs a family. Adam asks God what a family is. God tells Adam to lie down and he will show him. God raises his arms, the lights dim, the lights go up and Eve stands beside Adam. Eve is described as very pretty, 26 years of age and dressed like a country girl in a new gingham dress. God puts Adam and Eve in charge of the garden, tells them to enjoy themselves, but warns them not to eat from one tree. They immediately see the forbidden tree and head for it.

Back at the Sunday school lesson, Preacher Deshee asks the children what happened next. A child, Randolph, misbehaves and interrupts the class. A girl answers that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. She also says that Adam and Eve had children, Cain and Abel, about 100 years after they got married. Preacher Deshee says he is not too certain about the years, but the boy Cain was a "mean rascal."

Part 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The setting and the description of the creation of Adam and Eve by God, though whimsical, would have been very acceptable and familiar to the Christian African Americans in the deep South of the 1920s, before the widespread acceptance of evolution. The play was written right after the famous Scopes evolution versus creation trial. The children have already learned how Adam and Eve sinned and what happened next.

God's presence on earth raises the continuing theological issue of whether or not God actively intervenes in human affairs to maneuver them according to his wishes. It also questions what God determines to be better for us.

Part 1, Scene 4

Part 1, Scene 4 Summary

Cain, described as a husky young African American, stands over the body of his brother Abel, whom he killed with a rock. God enters. Cain explains that he was working in the field and Abel made fun of him. God says that he committed a crime. Cain counters by explaining it was Abel's fault by calling him a brainless fool. God does not judge Cain but sends him out of the county to find a wife and raise a family. Cain walks off. God tells Adam and Eve to have Seth and more children.

Part 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This story of Cain and Abel differs from that in the Bible, which refers to different sacrifices offered to God, one acceptable and one without explanation. Cain's justification for killing his brother in the play is as good a fable and more understandable. God's punishment remains the same. Cain is banished from his family to wander the earth. It is interesting that the author takes more time with this crime than with Adam and Eve's disobedience of God, and worth noting that the punishment for murder was banishment from the community.

Part 1, Scene 5

Part 1, Scene 5 Summary

Cain walks on an invisible treadmill until he reaches a tree with a sign that reads, "Nod Parish. County Line." He feels as if he has been walking for 40 years. He suddenly realizes that he has no place to find a family and that God, whom he has mistaken for a Preacher, has tricked him. Then a girl, identified as "Cain's Girl" begins to flirt with Cain from the branches of the tree offstage. She enters. The author describes her as wickedly pretty, flashily dressed and as big as Cain. After some flirtation, they leave to meet her folk. God enters, watches Cain and the girl leave and comments that he does not like the way things are going.

Part 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Forty years is a recurring Biblical theme meaning a long time. The Biblical "Nod" is not a fixed place but rather means wandering or exile. This is a charming and witty way to explain where Cain went and who was already there in images common to the deep South of the 1920s.

Part 1, Scene 6

Part 1, Scene 6 Summary

The setting is God's private office in Heaven, which resembles the office of an African American lawyer in Louisiana. It is a small room with a window that looks out on the sky. A framed religious print with a calendar attached underneath hangs on the wall next to the window. God sits in an old, creaky swivel armchair behind a battered roll top desk that is open and contains various papers stuck in pigeonholes. A row of law books sits on a shelf about the desk. A cuspidor and wastebasket are near the desk. God removes a cigar from a box on the desk and puffs on it without bothering to light it. The Archangel Gabriel sits in one of the cheap pine chairs in the office. He and God have been discussing the day's business, including the molting of the wings of Cherub Christina Montgomery. God tells Gabriel to fix the wings and be more careful. Gabriel removes his trumpet from the hat rack, polishes it with his robe, wets his lips and puts the mouthpiece to his mouth as if to play. God admonishes Gabriel to "watch himself" with that trumpet.

God picks up some papers and notices complaints that the moon is hot and melting. The angels have been partying and dancing on the moon on Saturday nights and making it hot. God declares dancing around the moon to be a sin and tells Gabriel to stop them.

Gabriel mentions the prayers he has been receiving from mankind on earth. God says he almost forgot about the earth. It has been 300 to 400 years since he was there and he was not pleased with his work. Gabriel says the time is half past, based on the sun and the stars. God decides to revisit the earth and see how the humans are doing. He tells Gabriel he will be back on Saturday.

Part 1, Scene 6 Analysis

The comparison of God's Heavenly office with that of an African American Louisiana lawyer, complete with roll top desk, squeaky chair and cuspidor is funny. It could be true. The author's imagery is very vivid and detailed, though the reader is left to wonder whether God or the angels chew and spit tobacco.

It is charming that God would have a calendar based on earth days while time is computed by the son and the stars. The author may have intended to show that time as we know it is different from God's time. The notion of the Archangel Gabriel blowing a trumpet comes from the Southern Gospel hymn, "When the Saints Go Marching In," not from the Bible.

Part 1, Scene 7

Part 1, Scene 7 Summary

Back on Earth, God walks along a country road and hears church bells in the distance. His pleasure is interrupted by a rouged and extremely flashy 18-year old female who sitting on a stump and singing the blues while playing a ukulele. She calls God "Banjo Eyes." She tells him people use Sunday to get over Saturday, and it is no longer the Sabbath. God calls her sassy and asks for her name. She flirts with God and compares him to a preacher. To her, all preachers are the "debbils." She wants God to kiss her.

God replies sternly that he will not touch her and again asks for her name. She says that she is Zeba, Seth's great-great granddaughter. Seth died of holiness. God replies that Zeba, who reeks of cologne, is on the road to Hell. Zeba responds that the preacher says that, but she is on her way to a picnic with her sweet papa, a young and flashy African American who enters the scene.

God asks him for his name. Without turning his attention from Zeba, he replies contemptuously, "Soap n' water, Country Boy." God repeats the question more sternly. The boy turns towards God and replies civilly that he is Cain the Sixth and that he lives most any place. God grows displeased with their making out and becomes invisible to them. Cain the Sixth pulls a gun and indicates that he will use it on Zeba or his competition for her affection, one "Flatfoot," from the other side of the river.

God continues his journey down the country road, enjoying the birds and flowers, until he sees a group of five adult African Americans and a boy who are apparently praying but are actually playing craps. One of the gamblers calls God "Liver Lips." God seizes the boy's ear, drags him to his feet and finds that he has been drinking, chewing tobacco and gambling. God takes the boy home, but discovers that the boy's mother has eloped with a railroad man and his dad is drunk and passed out under a table. God considers wiping all the people off the earth and populating it with angels, but the angels are not much on working crops and building levees. God decides the people would be right for earth if they would stop sinning.

Noah enters, dressed like a country preacher. He wears a hammer-tail coat and carries a prayer book. Noah says he has been having problems getting anyone to attend church. There are not enough choir members and Noah has to sing bass too. Noah asks God where he is going. God says he is planning to stroll on to the next town. Noah invites God to dinner at his home.

Part 1, Scene 7 Analysis

This scene introduces the theological concept of God being everywhere and not tied to one place like the local gods worshipped by non-Hebrews. God is very unhappy with his people's sins and tries personal intervention with the young gambler, but he

accomplishes nothing. He considers his options. The story of God wandering the earth is similar to one in the Biblical book of Job in which Satan roamed the earth. The portrayals of human nature and actions are amusing and true to life on earth. The character of Zeba was created by the author.

Part 1, Scene 8

Part 1, Scene 8 Summary

The scene in the interior of Noah's house is set in a combination living-dining room. It is clean and neat with a checked tablecloth over the dining table. A picture titled "God Bless Our Home" hangs on the wall. Noah and his wife are elderly and simply dressed. Noah introduces God to his wife as a preacher passing through the country. She invites God to stay for dinner. She goes out back to call their adult sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, to dinner. God and Noah sit, and God offers Noah a cigar.

God asks Noah what is the main trouble with mankind. Noah replies that the district is open to loose living, fighting, gambling and bootlegging, and that is just with the men. The women are stealing and gambling, and they lack moral sense. He tries to preach the Word but things just get worse. Only the good Lord knows what is going to happen. As both take a puff on their cigars, Noah's knee twitches, a signal that it is going to rain. God declares it will rain for 40 days and 40 nights.

God asks Noah if he recognizes Him. God stands to his full height with a crash of lightning, a moment of darkness and a roll of thunder. As the lights return, Noah is on his knees before God. Noah apologizes for not recognizing God or seeing his glory.

God explains that he is walking the earth as a natural man to find out who is good. So far, God has found only Noah and his family. Noah defends the other humans as poor sinners. God states that he is going to destroy the world. He will save Noah and his family and the animals, and he gives Noah instructions to build the Ark. God describes the magnitude of the flood to come and who and what will go on the Ark. Noah wants *two* kegs of liquor but God will permit one keg in the middle of the ship. They haggle, but God prevails. Noah's wife enters with a tray of dishes and food.

Part 1, Scene 8 Analysis

God has found one righteous family worth saving. This is similar to the Biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and a popular literary theme in different cultures where a god or similarly worthy person searches for a righteous person. Again, the 40 days and nights concept is used to signify a long time. The haggling over Noah's kegs of liquor on the Ark is both humorous and familiar in the 1920s South during Prohibition.

The image created when God stands up with a crash of lightning, moment of darkness and a roll of thunder is very dramatic.

Part 1, Scene 9

Part 1, Scene 9 Summary

Noah and his sons are building the Ark, a steamboat, and gathering the animals according to God's instructions. *Captain Noah* strolls the deck and smokes a pipe while giving orders. He wears a silk hat, captain's uniform and rain slicker. Noah's wife is in town telling the other women that it is going to rain for forty days and nights. Zeba and Flatfoot come to make fun of Noah's Ark, which is nowhere near water. Noah explains that the water will rise to the boat. They want to know if the Ark is going to be a stern wheeler paddleboat.

Cain the Sixth and the gambling men enter to laugh at the Ark. Cain the Sixth catches Zeba's eye, and she remembers his threat to shoot Flatfoot. Cain says he does not have a gun, and Zeba frisks him. Cain approaches Flatfoot and kills him with a knife. The others stop laughing, and Zeba is scared. She makes up with Cain. The others agree that Flatfoot was no good, and they do not want to bury him. He had not paid a woman for doing his laundry. He sold muggles (marijuana cigarettes) and said they had a kick like snow (heroin). The only person to be bothered by the body was Noah.

The rains start. Noah and his sons load the rest of the animals on the Ark. The others go home to get out of the rain. The thunder and rain gets louder. Noah and his son Ham load the elephants and pull up the gangplank. The stage darkens.

Part 1, Scene 9 Analysis

Steamboats and stern wheel paddleboats were common modes of transportation on the Mississippi River and in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1920s. The idea and imagery of Noah building a steamboat is very appropriate to this play. The project of building the Ark and saving the animals according to God's directions contrasts vividly with Cain's killing of his rival, the no-good Flatfoot, to retain possession of Zeba.

Part 1, Scene 10

Part 1, Scene 10 Summary

The Ark appears in the only lighted part of the stage. Noah repeatedly blows the steamboat whistle. His keg of liquor is nearly empty. Shem and Ham are topside smoking their pipes and talking. Shem sees a fish, which is the news of the week. The rain has stopped but the waters have not receded. Noah blows the whistle again, and Shem and Ham worry that he will wake up the animals. Mrs. Noah comes on deck to tell the sons to stop Noah, who is drunk, from pulling the whistle cord. She then confronts Noah and stops the whistle. Noah appears on deck, his hat rakishly tilted on his head. He tells Shem to send out another dove and Ham to check the sounding line. Noah says he is not drunk, just congenial.

Shem appears with the dove, and Noah tells him to let her go. Ham throws the sounding line over the side. As Mrs. Noah starts in on him again, they discover that there is only an inch of water under the Ark, and the dove returns with an olive branch. It is getting light in the east. Noah tells Japheth to take the dove to the animals to tell them where she found the branch so they know where to go. Mrs. Noah apologizes and exits.

Noah looks around. The water is gone and the Ark is on a hillside. There are two mountains in the distance and a rainbow over the Ark. Noah thanks God for this miracle, and God appears to Noah on the deck. God says he approves of how Noah's management of the ship. He even approves of his drinking on such a long steamboat ride. God tells Noah to let the animals out and to begin planting the seeds they brought. He is starting over with mankind. Noah exits. God listens happily to the sounds of the animals leaving and the birds twittering with excitement.

God summons Gabriel and shows him the new world. They discuss starting over with mankind. Both are concerned, but they agree that what is done is done.

Part 1, Scene 10 Analysis

The Ark is now quite obviously a steamboat. It has no keel and is level in an inch of water. It does not resemble any description of Noah's Ark in legend or the Bible.

The dove's revelation to the other animals is an old concept. Animals who talked with each other and with people were common Biblical stories.

God is right to be concerned about mankind. According to the Bible, Noah immediately plants a vineyard, gets drunk and complicates the lives of his children.

Part 2, Scene 1

Part 2, Scene 1 Summary

Two women are cleaning God's office. They have counted 46 thunderbolts God has pitched at the earth since breakfast. The women believe God is angry at mankind again because they have made the Devil king and work in shifts for him. They comment on how God's office has remained simple when everything in heaven is grand. They think that God must tire of all that golden glory. They leave when God enters.

Gabriel follows God into his office. He has been counting the thunderbolts. There have been 18,960 for the morning, including those hurled at the village with the fortune tellers.

God is not pleased with the inhabitants of the earth. Gabriel offers him more thunderbolts, but God realizes more thunderbolts will not help. Gabriel suggests another flood. God says the first one did not do any good. He explains that man is a kind of *pet* and he cannot give up. God's main problem is that mankind takes so much of His time. Maybe they can help themselves.

God and Gabriel talk about some of the better specimens, including Abraham's family. God has a new, undisclosed plan. He asks Gabriel to send in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They enter. They are all old men, with beards and wings of descending sizes to suggest their ages. God has decided that humans do not appreciate anything that does not require work. He asks Abraham to tell him the choicest property on earth. Abraham replies that it is the land of Canaan, and Isaac and Jacob agree. However, it is run over with Philistines, and someone must be put in charge. Isaac wants to know if God wants the holiest or the brainiest man. God replies that he wants the holiest, and he can make him brainy.

Abraham names his great-great-grandson Moses, who is hiding from the Egyptians in Midian County because he killed one in King Pharaoh's brick workers. God picks Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan as an honor to Abraham's family. God leaves to visit Moses on earth.

Part 2, Scene 1 Analysis

God is upset with humanity again and decides on personal intervention to redirect some people in better moral and physical directions. The physical descriptions of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are vivid and imaginative and would have been quite realistic in 1920s Southern African American culture. The story of Moses is basically the Biblical version. This raises the again the theological question of whether we want a God who actively intervenes in human affairs.

Part 2, Scene 2

Part 2, Scene 2 Summary

Moses, who stutters, is eating lunch in front of a turkey-berry bush (a common weed that originated in Florida) in front of a cave. His wife Zipporah stands beside him. They are inconspicuously dressed. As Moses puts the eating utensils back into the basket, he notices it is dark. Zipporah suggests that he move the sheep to another pasture. Moses replies that something is keeping him here. Zipporah thinks it is the Lord warning Moses about nearby Egyptians. Moses says they should have forgotten about that killing by now and besides, they have a new Pharaoh. Zipporah leaves with the basket.

Moses studies the sky to determine why it is so dark. Offstage, God replies that he wants it like that. Moses asks, "Who's dat?" God says he is the Lord. Moses replies that he sounds a lot like Moses' brother Aaron. The turkey-berry bush begins to glow and turn red. God tells Moses to notice the bush is not burning up. The light in the bush dies, and God appears from behind it. He explains that it was a trick.

Moses says that was the best trick he has seen. God explains that Moses will see and perform bigger tricks than the burning bush. God cures Moses of stuttering and explains that Moses is going to Egypt to lead God's people out of bondage and across the river Jordan to the Land of Canaan. It will take a long time, and they will have to work hard to get there.

God explains that Pharaoh will to stop them from leaving, but will show Moses the tricks he will do to get Pharaoh to agree. God lifts a stick to begin the first trick, but Moses stops God so he can include his brother Aaron in the demonstration. Moses calls to Aaron, who appears at the mouth of the cave in front of Moses. Aaron is a little taller and slightly older than Moses and is dressed like a field hand. He greets Moses and then sees God. God begins to show them the tricks they will do in Egypt.

Part 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The story Moses and the burning bush, along with the details of God's instructions to Moses with his brother Aaron to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, would have been very familiar to rural Southern African Americans in the 1920s,. They would have known the details of *all* the Biblical plagues, because these are very dramatic stories. There were no turkey-berry bushes, native to the southern United States, in the Middle East.

Part 2, Scene 3

Part 2, Scene 3 Summary

The scene is the Egyptian Pharaoh's throne room, which resembles an African American lodge room. Numerous fringed banners adorn the walls. Some of the inscriptions are "Sublime Order of Princes of the House of Pharaoh Home Chapter," "Supreme Magicians and Wizards of the Universe," "Private Flag of His honor Old King Pharaoh" and "Royal Young People's Pleasure Club."

Pharaoh is seated on his elevated throne, an ordinary armchair with a drapery over its back. His attendants are dressed in ritualistic garb, including plumed hats, military uniforms and elaborate belts with swords and scabbards. Two old men are dressed in bright robes with the word "Wizard" on their conical hats. The rest of Pharaoh's audience is finely dressed. A Candidate Magician is demonstrating tricks to Pharaoh for approval to become a royal magician. The two resident Magicians reject him, and Pharaoh tells him to go study his trade.

The Head Magician of Egypt enters. He is described as old and villainous, dressed in a costume covered with cabalistic (mystical) and zodiacal signs. The Head Magician reports Hebrew babies are being killed as ordered. Pharaoh tells him to think of something worse for the Hebrews, and the Head Magician suggests that the Hebrew slaves make bricks without straw. Pharaoh orders that the hands be cut off of those who refuse.

Pharaoh asks to see magic tricks. The Head Magician replies that he is so tired from the baby killing that he cannot lift a wand. Pharaoh consults the cards and finds that the spell casters cannot begin work until noon that day. With no further business or entertainment, the group decides to adjourn for the day.

There is a furious banging on the door. Soldiers open it, and Moses and Aaron enter. Pharaoh is angry at seeing Hebrews and screams at the soldiers to kill them. Aaron swings his rod, which stings the hands of the soldiers and forces them outside a protective circle around Moses and Aaron. They explain that they are magicians. Pharaoh instructs his own magicians to give Moses and Aaron gri-gri, or voodoo magic. The Head Magician replies that he cannot think of the right spell to cast, because Aaron and Moses have a new kind of magic involving electricity.

Moses explains that he and Aaron will show Pharaoh some tricks and then ask him to do something for them. Pharaoh asks if the trick will hurt anybody. Moses says it will not. Aaron then turns his walking stick into a snake, picks up the snake, and turns it back into a walking stick. After the trick, Moses asks Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Pharaoh refuses to let his brickyard slaves go and asks to see another trick. This time, Moses and Aaron use the magic rod to produce a plague of flies. The room grows dark and the audience hears a loud buzzing of flies. Pharaoh agrees to release the

Hebrews if Moses and Aaron will remove the flies. Pharaoh then says lied and asks if they can perform any other tricks.

Aaron lifts the wand, and Moses chants to bring stinging gnats. The stage darkens again and the audience hears the humming of gnats, the slapping of hands and complaints about getting stung. Pharaoh tells Moses he will let the Hebrews go if Moses removes the gnats. A gnat stings Pharaoh on the nose. Pharaoh admits he lied again, and he and Moses argue. Moses says that for the next trick, he and the Lord God of Israel will strike down the oldest Egyptian boy in each house. Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrews go, but Moses no longer trusts him. Aaron raises the rod again and the oldest sons of all the Egyptians, including Pharaoh's son, are killed. Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrews leave Egypt.

Part 2, Scene 3 Analysis

This scene has been updated and recreated for both drama and the amusement of the audience. It is very vivid and imaginative and would have been spell-binding for the audience. Lodges with costumes, colorful decorations and ceremonies were quite common in the decades in which this play was written and performed. The interaction between Aaron, Moses and Pharaoh is fairly accurate from a historical point of view. Time has been condensed and the familiar plague stories are altered to fit what can be accomplished in a stage production.

Part 2, Scene 4

Part 2, Scene 4 Summary

The ragged group of Hebrews marches on a treadmill towards the mountains and the Land of Canaan. The foot of a mountain appears, and a trumpet sounds as the mountain reaches center stage. The marchers stop walking and singing to express concern about what is happening. An aged and weary Moses enters, leaning on Aaron's arm. Moses slowly sits down on the rock at the foot of the mountain. Moses explains that he cannot continue. He has been leading his people towards the Promised Land for the past forty years. Moses' eyes grow dim. He tells Aaron that God said he could lead the Hebrews to the Jordan River, and that he would see the Promised Land, but he could not enter it.

Joshua, a African American man about 30 years of age, enters and reports that the Jordan River is directly ahead, and Jericho is just on the other side. They have reached the border of the Land of Canaan and its fortified first city. Moses tells Joshua to lead the army because Aaron must remain with the priests. They are to leave Moses behind. Joshua complains that they do not have enough men to capture the walled city of Jericho. Moses tells him to take the priests with rams' horns and start marching everyone around the walls. Then the Lord would take charge just as he had every other time Moses had led the Hebrews against a city. Moses tells everyone to follow Joshua. A trumpet sounds, and the company marches off to take the city.

Aaron remains behind. Moses tells him to take care of the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron says goodbye and leaves. God enters from behind the hill and walks Moses to a better Promised Land than the country across the Jordan River. They start up the hill. They take a step or two and Moses stops. He had told Joshua and the fighting men that the Lord would be there to help them. God says the Lord is indeed there. Moses wants to know who is helping him up the hill. God replies that is it his faith and his God. Moses does not understand how God can be in two places at one time. God tells him to listen. The blasts of the rams' horns and the sound of crumbling walls are heard in the distance. God and Moses continue up the ramp. The stage darkens.

Back at the Sunday school, Reverend Deshee, in the dark, reminds his children that the Hebrews disobeyed God's laws after they arrived in the Land of Canaan and again fell into bondage under the Babylonians.

Part 2, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene aligns with the Biblical story except for the presence of Aaron, who died years before Moses in the Bible. God did not let Moses enter the promised land of Canaan. This section again presents the theological issue of God's omnipresence,

which contrasts with the singular presence or purpose of the local gods. God is also the God of the Hebrew people and very mobile.

Part 2, Scene 5

Part 2, Scene 5 Summary

The court of the King of Babylon resembles a New Orleans nightclub. Flashy young men and women dance to music from a jazz orchestra. The dancers stop when a bugle sounds. The Master of Ceremonies enters to announce the arrival of the night's guest of honor, the King of Babylon and his party of five girls. The King wears evening clothes of the era, an imitation ermine cloak and a diamond tiara. Everyone rises as the king enters and sits at his table with his entourage. The king, expecting the High Priest, asks the Master of Ceremonies if any Hebrews are present.

The king and his girls dance wildly until the patriarchal, ragged Hebrew Prophet enters. The Prophet says, "Stop," and everyone does. The king does not understand this. The Master of Ceremonies tells the king that the Prophet said he was expected. The king says this is the wrong man and to throw him out. The Prophet again says, "Stop," and the king decides to listen to what he has to say.

The Prophet declares that he has been sent by the Lord God Jehovah to tell the Hebrews to repent before God casts down the same fire that burned up Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Hebrew High Priest, a fat man in brightly colored robes, enters with a gaudily dressed woman. The Prophet turns and asks why Jake, the High Priest of all Israel, is walking with a tramp of a woman. The High Priest explains that the Prophet is a wild man like Jeremiah and Isaiah. He pushes the Prophet aside and goes to the king's table. The Prophet grabs the High Priest, turns him around and tells him that the Lord God is going to destroy the wicked world. The king orders the Prophet shot. There is the sound of a shot, and the Prophet falls to the floor. He tells the Lord to destroy them all. The Master of Ceremonies, revolver in hand, looks down at the Prophet and pronounces him dead.

The High Priest becomes uncertain of his position and suggests that the Lord might not approve of the king's order to shoot the Prophet. The king replies that the City of Babylon is protected by its own gods. He tries to buy off God by paying the High Priest a couple hundred pieces of silver. As the High Priest begins to pray for forgiveness for his friend and king, who did not know what he was doing, a clap of thunder sounds and darkness descends. When the lights go up, God is standing in the center of the room.

God declares, in a voice of doom, that he has had enough. He recites everything that he has done to make the earth good. Every time God has forgiven them, they have mocked Him. God is tired of it. He renounces them and states that he will not help them any more.

Part 2, Scene 5 Analysis

In addition to its humorous characterizations, inventions and modern inclusions and references to guns and electricity, this scene raises important theological issues. The king of Babylon believes that local gods protect his city. This again presents the conflict between one omnipotent and omnipresent God against local gods tied to a place or purpose, such as rain or fertility. The Hebrews were taken into captivity by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar in about 605 B.C.E. (before common era).

According to the Bible, God did renounce his people and leave the earth. The book about the prophet Ezekiel, which follows the book of Jeremiah, in which the Hebrews become Babylonian captives, indicates that the presence or glory of God left the Temple in which God dwelled and did not return to earth. It is not clear which Biblical prophet is shot or if this is the author's creation.

God's anger is injured love. God has already intervened in human history several times. God has had enough and is hurt by what is happening.

Part 2, Scene 6

Part 2, Scene 6 Summary

God is writing at his desk. Hosea, a dignified old man with wings like Jacob's, stands outside waiting. God, still angry, does not let him enter though he senses Hosea's presence. Gabriel knocks at the door and enters to tell God that the delegation wants to see him. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses enter to ask God to return to the Hebrews. God reminds them that they have asked the same question for hundreds of years, and they know that God has given up on mankind and will not intervene for them again.

Hosea passes by the door again. Gabriel is perplexed as God again ignores him. God says he does not like that man. Gabriel explains that he is just a prophet, old Hosea, who arrived in Heaven the other day. God says Hosea is one of the few who have come to Heaven since his last visit to earth. Gabriel offers to tell Hosea to leave. God wonders why Hosea does not come in and say hello, but that is not the main problem. Every time Hosea passes the door, God hears Hezdrel's voice from earth. Hezdrel is one of the remaining defenders of Jerusalem.

Hosea's shadow appears on the wall, and God goes to the window to talk to Hezdrel. God relents and decides to return to earth to feel better.

Part 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The character of Hezdrel was created by the author. God is reveals his human side when He decides to intervene yet again on earth to feel better. This raises numerous theological issues, including whether or not God can make mistakes, change his mind and interfere with free will. The author likely decided to shorten the stories of the Old Testament by creating scenes that could have happened to bring the play to an end in a reasonable time and manner.

Part 2, Scene 7

Part 2, Scene 7 Summary

The defenders of Jerusalem are gathered in a shadowed corner besides the walls of the temple. The actor who played Adam in Part 1 plays Hezdrel. Hezdrel stands as Adam did when first discovered, but he carries a sword in his right hand and a sling in his left. There are bodies around him. He hears pistol and cannon shots and then a trumpet call. Six armed young men commanded by a corporal enter to say the fighting has stopped for the night. It will begin again at daylight when King Herod plans to take the temple, burn all the books and the Ark of the Covenant and kill all the defenders. Hezdrel reminds his troops that they go to God when they die. As the men disappear with the wounded, God emerges from the shadow.

God says, "hello" to Hezdrel and identifies himself as an old preacher from the hills who wanted to see how the fighting was going. Hezdrel replies that it is not going well. Hezdrel knows that they will all be killed, but they are not scared. God asks why. Hezdrel explains that they have faith in the Lord God of Hosea. God is puzzled, believing that he had not heard Hezdrel correctly. He asks if the God of Hosea is the same Jehovah who was the God of Moses. Hezdrel replies that the God of mercy preached to them by Hosea has replaced the old God of wrath and vengeance .

God asks Hezdrel if the God of wrath and vengeance is the same God as Hosea's God of mercy. Hezdrel says he does not know. Maybe mankind tired of God's old appearance. He believes that the God who walked the earth as a man saw only evil, which made him full of wrath and vengeance. The same God made the prophet Hosea, who would never have discovered mercy unless there was a little mercy in God. He explains that Hosea found God's mercy through his own suffering.

God changes the subject and asks Hezdrel what happens if he is killed in the morning. Hezdrel replies that if they die, they die. God asks about Herod's intention to burn the temple, the Ark of the Covenant and all the books. Hezdrel says those books are just copies. Every defender memorized the books. One hundred and fifty of them are scattered safely around the countryside, waiting for pen and paper to write the books down again.

Hezdrel insists the preacher leave as daylight nears. God asks if Hezdrel wants him to take a message to the people in the hills. Hezdrel asks God to tell the people there is no one like the Lord God of Hosea. God replies that, if Hezdrel is killed, then the God of Hosea will be waiting for him. God thanks Hezdrel for telling him what has been going on in his absence. The cock crows, and the fighting begins again.

Part 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Hezdrel is an imaginary but vivid character. King Herod did not take Jerusalem by force in this manner, but this is a condensed version of what did happen in the apocryphal years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is interesting that Hezdrel is played by the actor who played Adam. Adam, when created, was delighted with his *new* line of work, and this comment is never explained.

The notion of the Lord as "suffering servant" comes from the prophet Isaiah, not Hosea. The theme of Hosea's book is God's steadfast love for Israel in spite of the peoples' continued unfaithfulness. King Solomon placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple he had built in Jerusalem. After Solomon's death, the Ark is taken captive. Its subsequent locations are difficult to follow, but it is doubtful that it was in Jerusalem with Hezdrel. It is thought that a large portion of the Old Testament was written while the Hebrews were in captivity in Babylonia. Other familiar images are scrambled. Jesus predicted that the disciple Peter would betray him three times before the cock crowed. The Gospels of the New Testament were remembered and written down several centuries later. Some, the Dead Sea Scrolls, were hidden for safe keeping.

Part 2, Scene 8

Part 2, Scene 8 Summary

God is back in Heaven with the angel chorus standing in a double row to his left. Gabriel enters and looks at God, who stares thoughtfully towards the audience. Gabriel offers God a cigar. Gabriel gets a cup of custard, leaves it and returns to the side of God. Gabriel asks if something serious is happening. God replies that it is. Gabriel wants to know if it is time to blow his trumpet.

Gabriel asks God what he is thinking. God raises his hand and stops the choir. God replies that he is thinking about Hezdrel's comment that he and Hosea had found mercy through suffering. God is trying to decide whether that means that even God must suffer.

As God continues to look out over the audience, he looks surprised. He sighs. In the distance a voice cries,

"Oh, look at him! Oh, look, dey going' to make him carry it up dat high hill! Dey going' to nail him to it! Oh, dat's a terrible burden for one man to carry!"

God rises and murmurs, "Yes," as if in recognition. The heavenly beings are relieved as they see God smile. The angel chorus begins to sing, "Hallelujah, King Jesus." God continues to smile as the lights fade and the singing becomes very loud.

Part 2, Scene 8 Analysis

This play is based on Creationism and the original sins by Adam and Eve, whom God created, and Jesus as the Son of God must suffer and die on earth to compensate for those sins. God has decided to intervene in the affairs on earth once more by sending Jesus to the Hebrews to teach them again how to act and live righteously. Jesus assumes the burdens of the sins of all humanity. The author either assumes or does not address whether or not Jesus is actually the God or the Son of God. The play's original 1920s African American audience likely did not question the basic Christian beliefs that just as the original sin of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God brought death to the world, the death of Jesus brought life after death.

Jesus' suffering had just begun and that of his Father in Heaven was not yet ended. The crowd witnesses the beginning of the crucifixion. Before he died, Jesus felt and believed that he was alone and abandoned by his Father to suffer the pain of the crucifixion and death. We are all sinners and fall short of Jesus' perfect example and teachings. Through God's mercy and forgiveness, and through belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, we are able to live with God forever. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and part of the Trinity, then Jesus' suffering is God's suffering. It is easy to envision that God

heard Jesus' last words but could not change events after refusing to intervene on earth again.

The play stops prior to the crucifixion and does not portray the controversial issues of Jesus' resurrection and the meaning of his second coming.

This poignant ending supports the story as a fable. It is typical of comedies, in which we must cry in order to laugh.

Characters

Adam

Adam is the first man created by God to inhabit the newly created Earth and to cultivate the land. Adam is at first puzzled by his existence. He is described as a man "of thirty, of medium height, dressed in the clothing of the average field hand." God decides that Adam needs a family because "in yo' heart you is a family man." After Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, they are thrown out of the Garden of Eden.

Archangel

An Archangel appears at the "fish fry" in Heaven. He is described as older than the other angels and has a white beard. His clothes are "much darker . . . and his wings a trifle more imposing."

Cain

Cain is a son of Adam and Eve. When God comes down to Earth, he finds that Cain has just slain his brother, Abel, by hitting him on the head with a rock because, he claims, Abel had been making a "fool" of him. God tells Cain that he has committed a crime. He tells Cain to go as far away as possible. After traveling for a long time, Cain takes up with a country girl that he meets along the way.

Reverand Deshee

Mr. Deshee is the preacher who teaches Sunday school to the children in a Louisiana town. He tells them the story of the first five chapters of Genesis, then takes questions from the children. This opening scene frames the rest of the play, which is an enactment of biblical stories.

Eve

Eve is created by God so that Adam will have a family with whom he can live. Eve is described as "about twenty-six, and quite pretty." Her costume is that of "a country girl," with a gingham dress that is "quite new and clean." After they have eaten the forbidden fruit and are thrown out of the Garden of Eden, she and Adam have two sons, Cain and Abel.

Gabriel

Gabriel is God's right-hand man. He is described as "bigger and more elaborately winged than even the Archangel," but younger and without a beard. His costume is "less conventional than that of the other men" and is likened to the drawings of Gabriel by the artist Doré.

God

God is "the tallest and biggest" of all the inhabitants of Heaven. His costume includes "a white shirt with a white bow tie, a long Prince Albert coat of black alpaca, black trousers, and congress gaiters." His voice is described as "a rich bass," and he speaks in a southern black accent, as do all the characters. God created the Earth to drain off the excess "firmament" that resulted from a certain miracle. He runs Heaven from a desk in a shabby-looking office, with the help of Gabriel.

At the play's end, the Christian God turns out to be the same God as the Hebrew God, but seen from a different perspective by human beings. The difference between the old and the new perceptions of God is that the new is seen as more merciful. As the play ends, God, sitting in Heaven, decides to send down Jesus Christ to demonstrate to people a God who both suffers and is merciful.

Moses

Moses is chosen by God to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land of Canaan, which God has set aside for them. Moses goes with his brother Aaron to see the Pharaoh in his throne room. They demonstrate several "magic" tricks (with the help of God) in which they cause flies, and then gnats, to descend upon the Pharaoh's court. Each time, Moses vows that he will not call off the pests unless the Pharaoh promises to free the Jews from bondage in Egypt. Finally, the Pharaoh's son is brought to him dead, and the Pharaoh agrees to let the Jews go.

After leading his people out of Egypt, and leading them as they wander in the desert for forty years, Moses dies of old age just as they reach the Promised Land of Canaan. As God has foretold, Moses reaches the river Jordan, but is too old and sick to accompany his people into the city of Jericho. Moses appoints Joshua to succeed him. God then appears to Moses to show him that his people have won the battle over Jericho, and leads Moses to Heaven.

Noah

Noah, "a country preacher," meets God while walking along a road. He thinks that God is also a preacher, and tells him that the land is full of sinful, faithless people. Noah then invites God home to dinner with his wife. Over dinner, God reveals who he is, and draws

up the plans for Noah to build an ark, warning him of the flood that he will send to wipe out all the sinful people who inhabit the Earth. Noah obeys God's wishes, building the ark and bringing his family, as well as two of every kind of animal, aboard the ark. After forty days and nights, Noah and his family find dry land where they release the animals and plant the seeds they have brought.

Pharaoh

The Pharaoh is visited in his throne room by Moses and his brother Aaron, who come to demand that he free the Jews from bondage. The Pharaoh refuses until his son is brought to him dead, after which he agrees to let them go.

Zeba

Zeba is the great-great granddaughter of Seth. She is one of the sinners whom God meets along the road. Zeba is entirely invented by Connelly and does not actually appear in the Bible.

Themes

Sin

A central theme of Connelly's retelling of the stories of the Old Testament is sin. Ward W. Briggs, Jr., commented in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* "The theme throughout is that man sins and is either punished or renounced by God." The play presents the Earth and humans primarily from the perspective of God. Adam and Eve are the first sinners, and are punished by being thrown out of the Garden of Eden. After Cain has killed his brother Abel, God tells him, "I'm yere to tell you dat's called a crime," and advises him to go as far away as possible, then "git married an' settle down an' raise some chillun."

When, several hundred years later, God returns to Earth on a Sunday, he finds a girl singing blues music, a group of men betting, and a family wracked with drunkenness and debauchery. Walking down a country road, God comes upon Noah, who confirms that the people are "jest all lazy, and mean, and full of sin," and, "Dey ain't got no moral sense.' God is so displeased that he decides to drown all of the humans, except Noah and his family, with a flood.

After the flood, when a prophet is killed in Babylon, God becomes so enraged that He renounces humanity. God tells the people

Dat's about enough—I's stood all I kin from you. I tried to make dis a good Earth. I helped Adam, I helped Noah, I helped Moses, an' I helped David. What's de grain dat grew out of de seed? Sin! Nothin' but sin throughout de whole world. I've given you every chance. . . . Ev'ything I've given you, you've defiled. Ev'y time I've fo'given you, you've mocked me. . . . I repent of dese people dat I have made and I will deliver dem no more.

By the end of the play, however, God realizes that He needs to be a more "merciful" God, sympathetic to human "suffering."

Faith

While God finds mostly sinners upon the Earth, there are a few men who maintain their faith in him. Noah, for instance, appears as a country preacher, discouraged by the sinning of those all around him. Noah is rewarded for his faith when God gives him the plans and instructions to build an ark and save his family from the flood.

Moses is another who maintains his faith in God. When God first speaks to him, however, he is not convinced, until He performs several miracles, at which point Moses confirms his faith.

At the very end of the play, God conceives the idea to send Jesus Christ down to Earth, so that people may develop faith in a God who "suffers."

God's Relationship with Man

Connelly's play is notable for his everyday personification of God as a black man. Throughout the play, God's human qualities are emphasized, while his divine powers are also acknowledged. God is represented as a man who attends a fish fry in Heaven, tastes the boiled custard, and discusses the recipe with one of his angels. He also occasionally visits Earth as a human, walking side by side with various other characters. God's relationship to humanity is thus represented as very personal. Such a personification of God throughout the play makes way for the arrival of Jesus Christ, a God who suffers like a man, as the curtain goes down and the play ends.

Style

Setting

The Green Pastures takes place in several key settings, all of which interpret Old Testament Biblical stories in the context of Southern, rural, locations inhabited by African Americans. Connelly chose these settings as the context in which to retell biblical stories because he imagined that rural, Southern African Americans probably imagined the stories of the Bible to take place in the same type of locations with which they were familiar. (Today, Connelly's representation of such African-American conceptions of the Bible can be seen as stereotyped and without basis.) Heaven, for instance, is represented as a giant fish fry picnic, attended by angels, cherubs, an archangel, and God Himself. The Garden of Eden is set in the rural South, and is described in the stage directions as filled with trees, plants, bushes, and flowers native to the South. Babylon is depicted as "a Negro night club in New Orleans." God runs Heaven and earth from his "private office," a shabby old space, where "the general atmosphere is that of the office of a Negro lawyer in a Louisiana town." The throne room of the Pharaoh is described as resembling "a Negro lodge room."

Costumes

The costuming of the play combines and translates traditional conceptions of biblical characters into a rural southern African-American setting. Some of the stage notes describing the costumes, however, contain elements of the stereotyping Connelly employed in attempting to represent African-American culture. The angels in Heaven wear "brightly colored robes and have wings protruding from their backs"; however, they otherwise "look like happy negroes at a fish fry." God wears "a white shirt with a white bow tie, a long Prince Albert coat of black alpaca, black trousers and congress gaiters." Adam wears "the clothing of the average field hand," and Eve wears a "gingham dress," which is "quite new and clean." Noah is dressed as "a country preacher." The Pharaoh of Egypt wears "a crown and garments" which "might be those worn by a high officer in a Negro lodge during a ritual."

Biblical References and "Artistic License"

Almost all of the characters in *The Green Pastures* are drawn directly from the Old Testament: God, Gabriel, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Moses, etc. Connelly, however, took "artistic license" in creating several supplemental fictional characters to tell his version of these traditional biblical stories. The term "artistic license" is used to describe a writer's claim to the right to bend or alter facts, events, or characters in an unrealistic way to better suit her or his narrative concerns. In the "Author's Note" of the published play, Connelly explains that, "One need not blame a hazy memory of the Bible for the failure to recall the characters of Hezdrel, Zeba and others in the play. They

are the author's apocrypha, but he believes persons much like them have figured in the meditations of some if the old Negro preachers, whose simple faith he has tried to translate into a play." One such "apocryphal" character is Zeba, the great-great granddaughter of Seth. In the play, God encounters her during a visit to earth on a Sunday. When God meets her on a country road, she is singing a blues song, accompanied by a ukulele. She represents one of the many sinners God encounters during his visit. He chides her for singing blues music when she should be in church, but she merely responds to him in a "sassy" manner. Zeba turns out to be the girlfriend of Cain the Sixth, who later stabs a character named Flatfoot after he flirts with Zeba. Through this device of integrating such characters as Zeba into biblical stories, Connelly was able to narrate scenarios which were suited to the themes he wished to stress in his play.

Historical Context

African-American History and Culture in the 1920s-1930s

The Green Pastures was first produced in 1929, the year of the stock market crash that brought on the Great Depression. One reason for the play's continued popularity throughout the 1930s may have been due to the massive migration of African Americans from the South seeking employment in Northern cities. Since Connelly's play was seen primarily by white audiences, his portrayal of rural, Southern African Americans as humble, pious, "simple" people may have held a particular appeal to white Northern populations in urban centers.

The Green Pastures, while written by a white man, includes an entirely African-American cast of characters. Although by today's standards these characters are mostly stereotypes, this play represented a breakthrough in the history of African-American theater because of the unique opportunity it provided for black actors to play in major roles that went beyond standard bit-parts playing servants. During the 1920s, when *The Green Pastures* was first written and produced, African-American writers were strongly influenced by the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. Organizations such as the Krigwa Players in Washington, D.C., worked to promote African-American dramatic writing and theatrical production. Connelly, as a white man, was not involved in the Harlem Renaissance movement, although *The Green Pastures*, performed in New York City, would certainly have been noted by writers of the Harlem Renaissance. The Depression had a detrimental affect on the Harlem Renaissance, because many of the writers fell into economic hard times, which made it harder for them to pursue literary efforts.

The Green Pastures is set in an imaginary location in which biblical stories take place in settings that resemble the rural South, and are peopled exclusively by African-American characters. The historical era in which the play is set is referred to as biblical times. Connelly's representation of the rural Southern United States can be termed "pastoral"—meaning that it is depicted in an idealized, nostalgic light, which ignores any historical or social conflict taking place in the actual American South. Connelly's South is a world without white people, without racism, without a legacy of slavery, without the legal and illegal practices of racial discrimination that have characterized the history of the South, and without the struggles of African Americans to achieve equality and civil rights. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the real social and historical conditions that characterized the South in the 1920s and 1930s, during the time in which *The Green Pastures* was first written and produced—as well as during earlier periods in U.S. history which bear upon this era.

During the late 1920s, in which the play was first created, as well as the 1930s, during which it enjoyed enormous popularity among white Northern audiences, the legacy of racial discrimination in the United States, both in the South and elsewhere, involved a

number of conflicts and struggles. The Ku Klux Klan, an organization formed in the Post-Civil War Era, with the aim of maintaining white supremacy through violence and intimidation tactics, experienced a revival in the teens and twenties. In 1915, the Klan, which had essentially died out by the 1880s, was reorganized in Atlanta, Georgia—inspired in part by the 1905 novel *The Clansman*, by Thomas Dixon, which glorified the Klan, and the popular 1915 film adaptation of Dixon's novel, entitled *The Birth of a Nation* (directed by D. W. Griffith). This revived Ku Klux Klan flourished in the South and Midwest, boasting a membership of some four to five million during the 1920s. Membership in the Klan was at its highest of the twentieth century in 1928, when *The Green Pastures* was written. However, membership sharply dropped in the 1930s. Racist activities such as lynching, while not necessarily always organized by the Klan, also remained rampant from the early 1880s through the early 1950s, during which some 3,437 African Americans were lynched in a seventy-year period. In 1918, for example, sixty-three African Americans were lynched. By 1940, however, the number of lynchings had greatly declined. Great efforts to combat racial discrimination were also made throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Anti-lynching campaigns were waged by such African-American activists as Mary Elizabeth Church Terrell, and Walter White, and by white activists such as Jessie Daniel Ames, who founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930. Efforts at improving the status of African Americans in the U.S. through legislation included the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in 1909, with the leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois.

The Prohibition Era

In *The Green Pastures*, drinking alcohol— particularly on Sunday—is one of the sinful activities that God observes among the people he has created. Reference to drinking in 1929 is especially significant because it was in the midst of the Prohibition era in the United States, during which the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcohol was prohibited by federal law. Prohibition began in 1919, with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, and lasted until 1933, when it was rescinded by the twenty-first amendment. Prohibition was ultimately deemed unsuccessful because many lawabiding citizens continued to purchase and drink alcohol. That the entire liquor industry was run illegally by "organized crime," which was characterized by violent warfare among competing producers and distributors of alcohol. Prohibition, largely supported by Protestant organizations, was a major issue in the presidential elections of 1928, during which *The Green Pastures* was written. Republication Herbert Hoover won the presidency that year in part due to the support of Protestant, Pro-Prohibition voters. A major incident in 1929 was the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago, in which the gang led by Al Capone shot and killed seven members of the gang led by "Bugs" Moran. *The Green Pastures* represents a Protestant practice of Christianity and depicts drinking as a sign of sin and human corruption. Audiences watching *The Green Pastures* in 1929 would have been aware of the national issues surrounding drinking.

The Algonquin Round Table

Connelly was a member of the "Vicious Circle" of the Algonquin Round Table, also called simply The Round Table, an informal group of writers, dramatists, editors, and intellectuals who met daily for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City, during the 1920s and 30s, although the first meeting of The Round Table took place in 1919, and the final meeting in 1943. The Algonquin Round Table became known for its members' capacity for witty repartee and acerbic comments. Paul T. Nolan describes the "Vicious Circle," which they also called themselves, as "a group of wits that included half of the quotable men and women in New York during the 1920's." Among its prominent members were: the drama critic, poet, and prize-winning short story writer, Dorothy Parker; the comic film actor Harpo Marx; the writer Edna Ferber; the author, critic, actor, and informal leader of the Round Table, Alexander Woollcott; colorful stage and screen actress Tallulah Bankhead; drama critic, playwright, and speechwriter for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Robert E. Sherwood; and playwright and screenwriter George S. Kaufman. Connelly collaborated on a number of plays with George S. Kaufman, and with Edna Ferber. *The New Yorker*, a weekly magazine, was founded by Harold Ross, a regular member of the Algonquin Round Table, in 1925, and many of the members of The Round Table became regular contributors to the magazine. Connelly was among the first members of the editorial board of *The New Yorker*, which became popular for witty and urbane coverage of arts and culture in New York City. It was in the context of this milieu of screenwriters, actors, drama critics, and intellectual theatre-goers that Connelly created *The Green Pastures*, and one can only assume that the writing of the play was influenced by his association with The Round Table.

Critical Overview

The Green Pastures is Connelly's most outstanding literary achievement, garnering him a Pulitzer Prize, and, according to Ward W. Briggs, Jr., "theatrical immortality." Paul T. Nolan states, "*The Green Pastures* is the finest single piece of writing that Mr. Connelly has ever done," adding, "'*The Green Pastures*' . . . is the one play by Connelly that has never, except for minor cavils, been criticized for artistic 'faults.'" Walter C. Daniel comments that, during its first year-and-a-half run in New York, *The Green Pastures* "had gained praise from practically every source. It had kept the legitimate theater alive, literally, and had brought thousands of Americans and many visiting foreign dignitaries to see the spectacle at the time the nation was reeling from the pangs of economic disaster." Daniel goes on to state, "*The Green Pastures* presented night after night the dramatization of a shared religion and a vision through which both black and white Americans who realized their common bond in this experience could approach a social, moral, and philosophical coalition needed for the day. The artifacts of Hebrew folk stories, Negro spirituals, the dramaturgy of Marc Connelly with its superb stage sets, and the acting of the superb cast led by Richard B. Harrison combined to provide the crucial thoughtpiece for a frightened and desperate 1930 America." Nolan notes, "*The Green Pastures* is, undoubtedly, among the half dozen or so most respected plays in American dramatic literature," adding, "It gave Mr. Connelly an international reputation, a private fortune, and a great deal of personal satisfaction."

The Green Pastures opened at the Mansfield Theater in New York City, where it ran for 640 performances in 1930 and 1931. The play then made a national tour. It returned for a second run in New York in 1935, running for seventy-three performances, and only closing upon the death of Richard B. Harrison, the actor who had starred as God ("De Lawd"). A revival performance of the play on Broadway was attempted in 1951, but closed after a short run. Connelly wrote and directed the screen adaptation of *The Green Pastures*, which was produced in 1936 by Warner Brothers. Nolan notes, "The success of the film not only helped to make Connelly 'the highest paid' writer in Hollywood, but it also spread the fame of *The Green Pastures*." Connelly later wrote a television adaptation of the play, which aired in 1959.

The Green Pastures won immediate popularity and critical acclaim following its opening night on Broadway. According to Daniel, the *New York Times* drama critic J. Brooks Atkinson "wrote that Connelly's play excelled as comedy, fantasy, folklore, and religion. He, who became the play's most continuous and most ardent supporter, wrote that it was a work of surpassing beauty from almost any point of view." Further, "Atkinson believed Connelly created a miracle on the stage, which, after all, is what the theater is supposed to do." Nolan asserts that the play may be as famous a theatrical phenomenon as it is a literary and dramatic achievement: "The popularity of *The Green Pastures* is such that the history of the play, from its composition through its long runs both here and in Europe, has become a part of the legend of American drama; it is not too much to argue, in fact, that the 'story' surrounding *The Green Pastures* is probably the best-known single piece of theatrical history in America." Nolan adds, "*The Green*

Pastures and all associated with it have become part of the general cultural history of the 1930s."

Briggs, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, asserts that Connelly is "a central but not pivotal figure of twentieth-century American theatre: a man of enormous popularity but little lasting influence, of considerable instinctive talent but scant genius, of grand ideas but slight thought." Briggs sums up Connelly's theatrical career as one in which he "enjoyed the good fortune of early success, the advantages of a brilliant collaborator, and the services of the leading stars of his day." Briggs concludes, "Regardless of how his plays appear today, Connelly remains one of the most important figures of the Broadway stage in the first half of this [the twentieth] century."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses elements of legitimate African-American culture in Connelly's play.

In the "Author's Note" to the 1929 edition of *The Green Pastures*, Marc Connelly explains his intent in depicting stories from the Old Testament as peopled by everyday African Americans and set in rural Louisiana:

The Green Pastures is an attempt to present certain aspects of a living religion in the terms of its believers. . . . Unburdened by the differences of more educated theologians, they accept the Old Testament as a chronicle of wonders which happened to people like themselves in vague but actual places, and of rules of conduct, true acceptance of which will lead them to a tangible, three-dimensional Heaven.

Connelly's commentary likely strikes today's reader as based on an offensive stereotype of African Americans as simple and childlike. Thus, while prominent black religious leaders and intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois praised the play upon its first run in the 1930s, later critics, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalism, found it offensive in its stereotyping of African Americans. In the published script, stage directions describing "happy negroes at a fish fry," are reminiscent of the Sambo figure, and the character of a "Mammy angel" recalls the Aunt Jemima or black Mammy stereotype—both prevalent images throughout American cultural history.

Nonetheless, Connelly's play includes a number of more or less authentic elements of African-American culture, including: a well-researched rendition of the speech patterns of African Americans in rural Louisiana; the use of an all-black cast; the singing of "spirituals," or gospel songs, by a choir throughout the production; and reference to blues and jazz musical traditions.

While *The Green Pastures* does not necessarily reflect an accurate representation of African Americans or folk culture, it does use an authentic rendition of a Black Louisiana dialect. In the "Author's Note," Connelly acknowledges the source that inspired him to write the play: "The author is indebted to Mr. Roark Bradford, whose retelling of several of the Old Testament stories in 'Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun' first stimulated his interest in this point of view." Roark Bradford (1896-1948) grew up on a plantation in Tennessee, where he, a white child, heard many African-American folk stories from the black workers. In 1920, he began working as a reporter, and, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "met the colorful characters of various southern cities, including the musicians, preachers, and storytellers on the riverfront of New Orleans." Based on these experiences, Bradford wrote down a series of African-American folk stories, which were published in the New York *World*. His first book, a collection of the retelling of biblical stories from among his published works, *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, was published in 1928. Bradford's work, however, cannot be considered an accurate or

authentic representation of African-American folk culture. As is noted in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "A major weakness of Bradford's work is his reliance on stereotypes of his black subjects. Yet his writing accurately reflects their dialect, and his approach is gentle and humorous."

Connelly prominently acknowledged this source for his play, subtitling it: *A Fable Suggested by Roark Bradford's Southern Sketches, "Ol' Man Adam An' His Chillun."* However, Paul T. Nolan asserts in *Marc Connelly* that the influence of Bradford's work on *The Green Pastures* was minimal:

Bradford's book, as [Connelly] acknowledged in the preface to the play, had 'suggested' the play to him; but, largely, beyond the fact that *Ol' Man Adam* gave Connelly the idea of a biblical play done in southern American Negro dialect, *The Green Pastures* owes its literary source to the Old Testament and its diction to Connelly's research on the scene.

Nolan praises Connelly for his extensive and accurate research into the dialects of African Americans in the South:

Connelly spent considerable time in Louisiana, researching the subject . . . 'I went into the farm country of St. Francis Parish—near Baton Rouge,' he wrote of his experiences in Louisiana; ' . . . I read my play to sharecroppers.'

Nolan adds, "Connelly's ear for oral language, although given little attention in the discussion of his earlier plays, was always one of his great assets as a playwright." Nolan concludes, "Connelly was wonderfully trained and admirably suited by talent and interest to make the kind of careful language study that was necessary to give *The Green Pastures* its authenticity."

Although written, directed, and produced by white men, and attended by primarily white audiences, *The Green Pastures* was a significant event in the world of black theater. The Harlem Renaissance, a literary movement that flourished in New York's black Harlem neighborhood, inspired the development of black theater in the 1920s and 1930s. Theaters devoted to black productions were established in major cities throughout the United States, the most prominent being the American Negro Theater and the Negro Playwrights' Company.

While not a black production, *The Green Pastures* represented a new development in the presence of African Americans on the mainstream stage. According to Walter C. Daniel in *"De Lawd": Richard B. Harrison and The Green Pastures, New York Times* drama critic Brooks Atkinson saw *The Green Pastures* as a milestone in the on-stage representation of black culture:

Atkinson judged that audiences were rapt in attention because they realized they were in the presence of a new cultural artifact being performed before their eyes. That was the elevation of the folk art from riotous low comedy to something not yet named but essentially and demonstrably different from the ribald jokes and denigrating stereotypes of the black stage idiom.

Casting for the play created shock waves in the black drama world. Daniel observes, "Black actors hoped the play would bring them a new significance. Never before had so many black actors and singers been employed in a single stage endeavor.

A play about African-American culture and religion, written by a white author and featuring an all black cast, *The Green Pastures* was bound to raise racial issues at the time of its initial production. Connelly had had great trouble selling the play to a producer in the first place, for a variety of reasons, one being that, according to Nolan, "There were . . . fears that a play with a Negro actor playing God would offend the white, religious theatergoers." However, the casting of unknown sixty-five-year-old actor Richard B. Harrison as God ("De Lawd") turned out to be one of the production's finest attributes and a key factor in the long-running success of the play; upon Harrison's death in 1935, the play quickly lost its box-office appeal. Daniel observes, "The trick of putting a black God on the stage turned into fortune as Richard B. Harrison's talent at acting, dignity, rich voice, and gentle, endearing humor flooded over the auditorium and balcony." Furthermore, Harrison proved an important link between Broadway and African-American communities. According to Daniel, "Few of them could purchase tickets to see him [Harrison] perform at the Mansfield, but they related to him and clamored for his presence in their little theater groups, social gatherings, and churches."

Daniel observes that "equally important as the newspaper critics' comments on the play were indications of approval that came early from the clergy and from New York black intellectuals." W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, "praised *The Green Pastures* because in it Marc Connelly 'has made an extraordinarily appealing and beautiful play based on the folk religion of Negroes.'" Daniel adds that Du Bois "could not agree with those who considered the play sacrilegious." Furthermore, "Sermons preached in black and white local churches frequently included some reference to the play." In 1931, Harrison was awarded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Spingarn Medal for making the most significant contribution to the advancement of African Americans in the country that year; the award speech was delivered by Du Bois.

The Green Pastures brought authentic African-American culture to the stage through the key role of music in the play's production. Stage directions call for a choir, which breaks into spirituals as accompaniment to the biblical narrative of the play. Daniel describes the effect of the first sounds of the choir on the play's opening night, when "from the darkness came the burst of the magnificent sounds of the Hall Johnson Choir" singing "Rise, Shine, Give God the Glory."

The spiritual is a form of American folk music, characterized by the singing of hymns. Over time, black and white folk culture developed the spiritual along different lines, although sharing many hymns and tunes. Both are rooted in revival and camp meetings, a practice of Christian religious worship popular in the South. Important differences, however, developed between the two folk cultures. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Black spirituals were sung not only in worship but also as work songs, and the text imagery often reflects concrete tasks." The spiritual thus developed as "a complex intermingling of African and white folkmusic elements," in that "complementary traits of African music and white U.S. folksong reinforced each other." The musical style

of spirituals in particular is derived from African culture, as imported by the slave trade. "Most authorities see clear African influence in vocal style and in the . . . clapped accompaniments."

Spirituals sung in the play include: "When the Saints Come Marching In"; "So High You Can't Get Over It"; "Hallelujah"; "A City Called Heaven"; "Go Down Moses"; "Mary Don't You Weep"; and "Hallelujah, King Jesus."

Jazz and blues music, both strongly rooted in African-American culture and history, play a small but important role in *The Green Pastures*. The roots of jazz in African culture are especially strong. As stated in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

Had it not been for the traffic in slaves from West Africa to the United States, jazz would never have evolved, either in the United States or Africa, for jazz is the expression in music of the African native who is isolated both socially and geographically from his natural environment.

In Connelly's play, both jazz and blues are contrasted with the spirituals sung by the heavenly choir, and represent the human descent into sin.

In act 2, scene 7, when God returns to Earth on a Sunday to see how the people he made are doing, he first encounters Zeba on a country road. Zeba, "a rouged and extremely flashily dressed chippy of about eighteen," is sitting on a stump, singing "a 'blues'" and playing a ukulele. God immediately disapproves, saying "Now, dat ain't so good." He tells Zeba to "Stop dat!" When Zeba responds with indifference and resumes singing, God tells her, "Don't you know dis is de Sabbath? Da's no kin' o' song to sing on de Lawd's day." This encounter represents the first of many in which God finds that man has descended into sin, paying no heed to the Sabbath.

Act 3, scene 5, takes place in "a room vaguely resembling a Negro night club in New Orleans," where "about a dozen couples are dancing in the foreground to the tune of a jazz orchestra." The costumes are meant to "represent the debauches of Babylon." Connelly thus chose to depict a city which has descended into sin as a jazz club, and the sinners as flashily dressed young people dancing to jazz music.

Jazz music and, to a lesser extent, blues have long been associated with sin and debauchery. Flourishing in the red-light district of New Orleans, jazz became associated with moral depravity. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "jazz, linked to the black performer and the social events of black life in the city, retained a connotation of sin and dissipation for many years after the New Orleans pioneers were forgotten." The setting of Connelly's play in Louisiana, and the portrayal of Babylon as a New Orleans black Jazz club, is especially appropriate, as New Orleans is known to be the birthplace of jazz.

While today's reader will most likely balk at the stereotypical and condescending representation of African Americans in this play, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact it had on the black theater of the day, as well as the elements of legitimate African-American culture used within the play itself, such as black spirituals,

references to jazz and blues music, and the use of an accurately rendered black Louisiana dialect throughout the dialogue.

Critical Essay #2

The following chapter essay discusses elements within and surrounding Marc Connelly's play, including the composition and history of the work, its critical and social status, and its thematic elements.

The Green Pastures is, undoubtedly, among the half dozen or so most respected plays in American dramatic literature. It gave Mr. Connelly an international reputation, a private fortune, and a great deal of personal satisfaction. Unfortunately for his other works, it also gave many theater critics and historians the general impression that Marc Connelly was a one-play author. Such an impression came not merely because *The Green Pastures* is the finest single piece of writing that Mr. Connelly has ever done, but also because, in various superficial ways, it appears to be utterly different from all his other works. It is his only play about Negroes; it is his only full-length play on a religious subject; it is his only play without a conventional happy ending.

Critical Essay #3

The popularity of *The Green Pastures* is such that the history of the play, from its composition through its long runs both here and in Europe, has become a part of the legend of American drama; it is not too much to argue, in fact, that the story surrounding *The Green Pastures* is probably the bestknown single piece of theatrical history in America. In 1928, Harper and Brothers published a collection of dialect stories by Roark Bradford, *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, which was popular immediately with the Broadway literary colony. F. P. Adams, for example, on December 28, 1928, reported to his readers that he had had lunch with Bradford, "the author of my favorite book . . . and so to dinner with M. Connelly. . . ." This linking of *Ol' Man Adam* and Connelly by Adams was, probably, not accidental. Sometime earlier that year, Rollin Kirby, threetime winner of the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, had recommended the book to Connelly, who immediately saw dramatic possibilities in its materials; and in 1929, when he went to New Orleans to see Bradford, he wrote "the first act of *The Green Pastures* on the boat S. S. Dixie en route."

Connelly spent considerable time in Louisiana, researching the subject. Bradford's book, as he acknowledged in the preface to the play, had "suggested" the play to him; but, largely, beyond the fact that *Ol' Man Adam* gave Connelly the idea of a Biblical play done in Southern American Negro dialect, *The Green Pastures* owes its literary source to the Old Testament and its diction to Connelly's research on the scene. "I went into the farm country of St. Francis Parish—near Baton Rouge," he wrote of his experiences in Louisiana; ". . . I read my play to sharecroppers." Connelly's ear for oral language, although given little attention in the discussion of his earlier plays, was always one of his great assets as a playwright. Sometimes critics, like John Mason Brown, had complained that his ear for the idiom—"the half-written Algonquins"—led him to sacrifice plotting for tone, theme for "local color"; but, if his friends on Broadway had thought about the problem of research in terms of language, they would have agreed that Connelly was wonderfully trained and admirably suited by talent and interest to make the kind of careful language study that was necessary to give *The Green Pastures* its authenticity.

Mr. Connelley, moreover, had always had a great deal of sensitivity to intent. Charley Bemis in *The Wisdom Tooth*, J. Daniel Thompson in *The Wild Man of Borneo*, and Merton in *Merton of the Movies* are all treated as heroes, not because they perform heroic actions or make heroic speeches, but because, in spite of their doing the weak thing and saying the wrong thing, Connelly "intuits" their good intentions. This sensitivity to intent, as well as Connelly's eye and ear for accurate detail, has made *The Green Pastures* appealing to millions of viewers and readers who have been able to gain from the experiences of the characters some insight into their own lives.

Connelly spent over a year writing the play and then another six months looking for a producer. All of the established New York producers turned down the play, in spite of Connelly's reputation for commercial success, convinced that, for a variety of reasons, *The Green Pastures* would be "bad business." Few religious plays succeeded at the

box office, and, at the time, no play with an all-Negro cast had ever been a good investment. There were, moreover, fears that a play with a Negro actor playing God would offend the white, religious theater-goers. Finally, Rowland Stebbins, a retired stockbroker, made himself a part of American theater history by risking his reputation for financial shrewdness by backing the play. Connelly's casting of the play—especially the selection of Richard B. Harrison to play the Lawd—is almost a separate story, certainly an important episode in the history of the Negro actor in American theater.

The play opened in the Mansfield Theatre in New York on February 26, 1930; and, although there were still a few doubts about the financial future of the play, there were none about its worth as drama. Burns Mantle summed up critical opinion when he wrote of the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize to *The Green Pastures* as the best play of the year: "In the awarding of the prize, not a single dissenting voice was heard, either in the committee or in the press. . . ." *Variety* approved of the play as "art theatre," but expressed doubts that the play would run long in a commercial theater.

Some critics, to be sure, had reservations about certain aspects of *The Green Pastures*. Mantle, for example, felt there was some injustice done to Bradford, who was given credit merely for "the suggestion," rather than as a collaborator. Francis Fergusson, in answering that charge, called *The Green Pastures* "a myth [belonging more to the Bible than to Bradford] which Mr. Connelly discovered nearly intact and devoted himself humbly to translating into stage terms." Fergusson argued that Connelly's discovery of the "truth" in Bradford's "farcical" tales deserved special credit. "Discovery of this kind," he wrote, ". . . is of course more creative than confecting something supposedly new." Fergusson, however, complained that the "sinful folk" were modeled on "smart Harlemites," rather than on the Louisiana Negro, perhaps unaware that the New Orleans native, of any race, is also metropolitan, "smart." In commenting upon Fergusson's complaint, Mr. Connelly told me, "The Harlem aspect mentioned was an actual attempt to create the atmosphere I found in the 'barrel-house' in New Orleans." Fergusson's complaint was, moreover, only a qualification; and he approved of Connelly's other characters. "He has managed," Fergusson wrote, "to avoid condescending. . . ."

The Green Pastures and all associated with it have become part of the general cultural history of the 1930s. Mantle, in writing of a new play that Rowland Stebbins produced a dozen years later, for example, identified Stebbins as the man "who will be known to the end of the century as the noble soul who had enough faith in Marc Connelly's 'Green Pastures' to bring it to production after so-called wiser heads of Broadway had neglected to do so." *The Green Pastures* was even given credit for "saving" the reputation of the Pulitzer Prize. In commenting upon other Pulitzer Prize selections for 1929-30, a reviewer for the *Literary Digest* argued that *The Green Pastures* was the only work awarded the prize that year that "No one questions. . . ." All the other Pulitzer choices were challenged, sometimes bitterly. Why should Oliver LaFarge have been selected rather than Hemingway, or Conrad Aiken rather than Elinor Wylie? With obvious approval, the *Literary Digest* concluded its account with a statement from Woollcott's article in the *Morning Telegraph: "'The Green Pastures'* does not need the Pulitzer Prize, but, oh, how the Pulitzer Prize needs '*The Green Pastures*.'"

Perhaps longer than any other twentieth-century American play, *The Green Pastures* was important for its news value alone. In the 1930s, the production of the play, the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize, the suggestion that the play demonstrated an awakened social conscience, the various long-run records that the play established, all were reported with enthusiasm by the press. And then in June, 1935, while the play was still enjoying an unbroken run throughout the United States, Warner Brothers purchased the film rights to it on terms that "were all Connelly's." He directed it, staged it, cast it. The success of the film not only helped to make Connelly "the highest paid" writer in Hollywood, but it also spread the fame of *The Green Pastures*.

In 1951, Connelly again staged *The Green Pastures* in New York. It opened at the Broadway Theatre March 15 and closed April 21. "No amount of enthusiasm on the part of the individual critic, including this editor," John Chapman wrote of that production, "could make this American miracle play stick. Modern Broadway was just not interested in de Lawd, Gabriel, and the fish-loving angels." Although in one respect *The Green Pastures* on the professional stage is past history at the moment, the play still has its supporters by the thousands, men like John Mason Brown, who, as late as 1963, summed up his critical opinion with this statement: "Let's face it with proper gratitude. *The Green Pastures* is a masterpiece."

For the past two decades, however, there has been a general feeling that the play is too simple for complex academic criticism, too soft for an age of revolution, and perhaps too patronizing for the new role of the Negro in the United States, too much like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Just a few years ago, for example, the Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church charged that the play was "irreligious" and "perpetuated outmoded stereo-types" of Negroes. As these various comments indicate, much of the existing criticism of the play has been concerned with its stage history rather than with its literary merit and ideational content. A recent edition of *The Green Pastures*, with sensible, religious essays by W. R. Matthews, John Macmurray, and Henry Self, gives hope that a new interest in the play—a critical interest—is coming into being.

Critical Essay #4

The tremendous success of the play in the theater, strangely enough, seems to have discouraged serious dramatic criticism about the merits of the play as literature, to a large degree, perhaps, because its "literary merit" was never questioned. Most critics have been content merely to state a verdict. Joseph Wershba, for example, has said that for this play alone Connelly has "assured himself a lasting place in American drama . . ."; and this judgment has been rendered hundreds of times. *The Green Pastures*, which has been republished in at least thirty-three different anthologies in the past thirty-seven years, is the one play by Connelly that has never, except for minor cavils, been criticized for artistic "faults."

During the past twenty-five years, however, it has become the fashion to praise the play for what it was, not for what it is. John Gassner, for example, calls *The Green Pastures*, "a play that is inscribed in the permanent records of the American theatre." His critical discussion of the play, however, is limited to a short statement concerned with the difficulty of classifying it: "*The Green Pastures* is unique; it cannot be placed in any existing classification without some reservations. . . . Is there no discrepancy between the 'Harlem' scene and the spirit of the play? Is the play entirely free from a spirit of condescension toward primitive folk and their notions? Yet one cannot overlook the tremendous fascination the play exerted for years after it opened on Broadway. It seemed the culmination of everything we considered a movement toward folk drama for at least a decade, and it was also the only religious drama anyone succeeded in making tolerable to the American public since Charles Rann Kennedy's old-fashioned morality play, *The Servant in the House."*

E. Bradlee Watson and Benfield Pressey also defend the play in historical terms: ". . . *The Green Pastures* . . . seems itself both miraculous and inevitable —miraculous because it arose out of such unpredictable comings-together; inevitable because by 1930 the theatre in America was overripe for a great Negro play and a great religious play. . . . Unconsciously . . . America needed *The Green Pastures*." In judging the play as living dramatic literature, however, they are less certain: although ". . . it remains a monumental attainment in the American theatre," they write, ". . . it is not likely to be often available in revivals. . . ."

The Green Pastures, to be sure, is an expensive play to stage; but the modern reader still finds it an exciting experience, not merely an historical monument. In an interview with Ward Morehouse in 1951, following its last full-scale professional revival, Connelly said of the play: "I'm glad that the critics find it a simple play. I feel that it is offered as an honest inquiry into man's attempt to find dignity and virtue within himself, that it invites introspection and a search for old dignities."

Critical Essay #5

The Green Pastures is not a play utterly different from everything that Connelly had done before; *The Deep Tangled Wildwood, The Wisdom Tooth*, and *The Wild Man of Borneo*, for examples, are quite obviously searches for "old dignities." What distinguishes *The Green Pastures* from these earlier plays is its scope. In this play Connelly selected his materials, not from minor aspects of contemporary society, but from the central religious-philosophical myth of Western civilization, the Hebraic-Christian accounts in the Bible; and he then applied some of the implications of that myth to one group of suffering American humanity, the Southern Negro.

The play is divided into two parts: the first, in ten scenes; the second, in eight. The first part opens in a Negro Sunday School in New Orleans, where the kindly preacher, Mr. Deshee, is beginning a study of the Bible for his young charges. Although, seemingly, the selection of the Biblical episodes— life in Heaven before creation, the creation of Adam and Eve, the fall of Cain, and the Noah story— merely follow a chronological account, they have a thematic purpose: they deal with a theory of human reformation. They present, from the Lawd's point of view, a theory of crime and punishment. Man—especially starting with Cain—has sinned; and with the flood, he has been punished. The new world— that is "startin' all over again"—is founded only by the virtuous, the chosen few who survived the flood.

Many of Connelly's earlier plays stopped at this point, the moment of the new start; but quite obviously, in the context of *The Green Pastures*, a good life created by the "remaining virtuous" is too narrow a view of man to succeed. It is not merely that the first part ends with God saying softly, "I only hope it's goin' to work out all right"; it is, also, that Gabriel, while still respectful of the Lawd, has "no enthusiasm" for the success of the project.

In the second part of *The Green Pastures*, the materials are selected from episodes in the Bible from the story of Moses to the fall of Jerusalem; and, upon first observation, the second part seems merely to repeat the theme of the first: man, in spite of God's help, again proves incapable of reform. This time, God does not punish with a flood, but with a renunciation. Quite obviously, the history of man, from the Lawd's point of view, demonstrates that mankind is incapable of being "worthy of de breath I gave you."

Starting with the sixth scene of Part Two, however, *The Green Pastures* moves from a concern with the "reformation" of man to a concern with the "nature" of man. The question is no longer, "How can man be reformed?"; instead, it becomes, "What is man?" In the seventh scene, the Lawd gets a suggestion of an answer to that second question: man is a creature full of weaknesses, but he tries. He has hope in the midst of catastrophe, courage in the midst of despair, and compassion in the midst of suffering. And he learned to be so wise "Through sufferin'," as Hezdrel tells God.

God, when He comes to understand His own creation, learns the lesson: even a God must suffer, must be involved with mankind as man is. *The Green Pastures* ends in the

spectacle of Christ on the cross; and the "Voice," man, learns not to behave differently, but to feel beyond himself. The play ends with the extension of human sympathy to a suffering God: "Oh, dat's a terrible burden [involvement with suffering mankind, as well as the cross] for one man to carry!" As Vincent Long comments in his "Introduction" to the play, however we start our association with *The Green Pastures* —with "amusement" or with "indulgent condescension" —"We soon find . . . that we are entering into an experience of real religion."

The "religious truth" of the play is not, however, concerned with a question of theology. It is, rather, concerned with man's relationship to man. If, the play seems to ask, even with a just God, man sins but is yet redeemed because he knows suffering and has learned mercy, how should men treat each other? Specifically, the question raised for an American audience centers around the attitude the fortunate white-American theater-goers should have toward "the least of these, thy brothers."

Critical Essay #6

Modern Negroes, weary of the "Uncle Tom" picture of the "Good Ol' Darky," may be offended at the opening scene of *The Green Pastures*. Although Mr. Deshee is shown as a good man, he is a kind of "Uncle Tom," a man who *seems* so simple that his goodness appears to be the result of simplemindedness rather than of virtue. In the first Sunday School scene, for example, he is teaching a class of small Negro children. In his opening speech, he summarizes the first five chapters of Genesis; and the emphasis is entirely upon long life: "Adam lived a hundred an' thirty years an' begat a son in his own likeness . . . Seth. An de' days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years!" The only reference to contemporary life is that "ol' Mrs. Gurney's mammy" is called "ol' Mrs. Methusaleh caize she's so ol'." This summary, with its list of *begats and deaths*, Mr. Deshee calls "de meat and substance" of the first five books; and he concludes his lesson with the question, "Now, how you think you gonter like de Bible?"

All questions from the children are answered with a proper respect for conventional morality and a dependence upon the literal truth of the Bible as Mr. Deshee understands it. In the third scene, for example, one boy wants to be certain that Adam and Eve had been married a proper length of time before the birth of Cain. "My mammy say it was a hund'ed years," the boy says. Mr. Deshee admits that it is now difficult to be exact about the number of years, but his answer assures the boy that at least the proper number of months had passed.

This concern with age and with proper behavior seems to suggest a lack of understanding of the "central truths" of the religious story, at least from the view of modern, educated Americans in the 1930's. Mr. Deshee, however, is not ignorant of life. As the spiritual leader of a people who live hungry, die young, and face day-after-day indictments that they are "by nature" immoral, Mr. Deshee's concern with age and conventional behavior is part of an attempt to translate the abstract religion into a practical guide. A people who die young must be impressed by old age.

Connelly avoids making obvious social-protest associations. Mr. Deshee's life among the poor, the hungry, and the shamed—the Negro scene—is never mentioned. Rather a kindly, old preacher and a chorus of innocent children set the stage. No one, whatever his racial opinions, would deny the basic goodness of such people; but the audience's sympathy for this group must also be mixed with some mild, sophisticated contempt. Undoubtedly in such a state, the folk are good; but the suggestion is that "such a state" is, therefore, necessary for them.

The first scene in Heaven, the second scene of Part One, develops the same concept of the good, simple "Darky" and suggests the kind of state necessary for his goodness. This scene does show "adults"—Angels, God, Gabriel; but the notion of their "simple goodness" is strengthened by their childlike responses and by the fact that, in terms of the religious story used, they are naturally good. Connelly, moreover, surrounds them with children, Cherubs. The use of characters who conform to the stereotype of the

"good Darky" and who are yet loosely drawn from the Biblical story makes a sentimental appeal to the audience. Showing the "naturally" good, simple Negro in his pursuit of "naturally" good, simple goals reinforces a sentimental view with a religious overtone. The normal audience response, it seems to me, is largely sentimental; but there must also be the slightly uncomfortable feeling that this sentiment has the support of powerful forces.

Critical Essay #7

In the following scenes—with Cain, with the blues-singing Zeba, with the Children of Noah, with the Children of Israel, and in the "Harlem" scenes that Francis Fergusson and John Gassner did not like—the Lawd and the audience have another view of man, the Negro. To some degree, the desired response is also to a stereotype: the Negro as naturally violent and naturally brutal. The evidence offered is overwhelming. He is a "depraved being" capable of any crime: he kills his brother, he steals, he lies, he betrays. He does, in fact, everything that all the imperfect heroes and villains of the Old Testament did; and he does it all in a fashion that will allow those who view the Negro actors in the play to conclude that what is being shown is a Realistic portrayal of "Negro behavior."

The uneasiness of those who would like *The Green Pastures* to be a propaganda piece for the Negro—both white critics in the early 1930's and Negro leaders in the 1950's and 1960's—is a clear demonstration that Connelly did his work well. The audience is ready to join the Lawd in His weariness with sin. "Dat's about enough," the Lawd announces. "I's stood all I kin from you. I tried to make dis a good earth. I helped Adam, I helped Noah, I helped Moses, an' I helped David. What's de grain dat grew out of de seed? Sin! Nothin' but sin throughout de whole world. . . . So I renounce you. Listen to the words of yo' Lawd God Jehovah, for dey is de last words yo' ever hear from me. I repent of dese people dat I have made and I will deliver dem no more."

Connelly's insight into the nature of the "Good Outsider," weary with the "transgressions of the folk," seems so fresh that this characterization might have been created in the 1960's, rather than in 1930, as the play relates to the race problem in the United States. White Americans still complain that the Negro drive for "equal rights" is moving too fast, some evidence perhaps of a repentance of past "deliverances."

The accumulative view of these central scenes of the play contrasts with the first three scenes and shows the Negro as violent and depraved. At first, a sentimental solution seems suggested; for, if the Negro could move back to the world of Mr. Deshee's Sunday School and the Heavenly fish fry, there would be no necessity to deal with the world of Cain and Harlem; however, the Lawd, like the audience, must contemplate punishment and desertion as the answer.

Critical Essay #8

With the Lawd's renunciation scene, however, a pronounced change takes place in the tone of the play and in the response from the audience. Until the last few scenes, the white, sophisticated audience has been watching—with some amusement, some sympathy, and probably some impatience— the history of "the folk" from the point of view of the Lawd. In another place, I have argued that, in spite of the fact that the Lawd was played by a Negro actor, his character, in part, is based on a stereotype of the "Good White Man," as he sees himself in relationship to the folk. There may be some question as to the validity of that argument, but there is little to the assumption that the Lawd in his renunciation speech reflects the varied attitudes of well-meaning, sympathetic, tired outsiders to the problems and errors of the folk.

From the moment of renunciation, however, the Lawd, in dramatic terms, loses his superiority. In the sixth scene of Part Two the Lawd recognizes the righteousness of Hosea, now a resident of Heaven, although Hosea obviously disagrees with the Lawd's renunciation. He becomes the Lawd's superior, and in their conflict—an unspoken *agon* —Hosea overwhelms the Lawd. The Lawd's final speech in this scene shows his capitulation to a superior force. "You know I said I wouldn't come down," the Lawd shouts down to the voice of goodness on earth after Hosea's silence has weakened his resolve. "Why don't he answer me a little? Listen, I'll tell you what I'll do. I ain't goin' to promise you anythin', and I ain't goin' to do nothin' to help you. I'm just feelin' a little low, an' I'm only comin' down to make myself feel a little better, dat's all."

In the last dramatic scene of the play, the Lawd comes in conflict with Hezdrel, one of the characters Connelly created without Biblical authority. If the characters to this point in the play can be divided into "good, simple" and "bad, smartalecky Harlem" Negroes, Hezdrel is something new. He is good, courageous, faithful, but he is also a complicated human being, wiser in the matters of man than the Lawd himself. The Lawd, in fact, finally has to ask Hezdrel for the secret of knowledge—how does one (even God) discover mercy? Hezdrel's answer— "Through suffering"—leaves the Lawd confused, but full of admiration. The Lawd is now an "inferior being" who must be removed from the scene of the heroic action for his own safety. He can be only a supporting character as He leaves the heroic Hezdrel, giving the battle cry of man, "Give 'em eve'ything, Boys."

In these two scenes, the audience's sympathy must shift from the Lawd to Hosea and Hezdrel. They are, in terms of *The Green Pastures*, morally superior. They hold, in terms of their agons with the Lawd, the same position that Tiresias holds against Oedipus, Antigone against Creon: they are right. At this point, the audience must become aware that, although the actors are Negroes, the subject is man; and the Lawd's renunciation of "dese people" includes not merely the *folk* in the play, but the folk in the audience.

The identification of the audience with the Lawd has now ceased. The history of the play is no longer a Negro history, but the history of Hebraic-Christian man. If the white

outsider continues in his sympathy with the Lawd's decision to withdraw from the Negro world, he must put himself in a world from which God has withdrawn, and he must approve of that withdrawal. The sophisticated audience has been sentenced by its own biases to a Godforsaken world.

The Lawd of *The Green Pastures* concludes that He cannot judge men fairly from without, and the play ends with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Whether this is orthodox Christian doctrine or not is a matter for theologians, but from a dramatic point of view, Connelly's *The Green Pastures* offers a successful pattern for the writer of folk drama. He starts with the biases for and against the folk, and he forces his audience to examine these biases and their assumptions not only about the "folk" but about themselves. Once we are caught up in *The Green Pastures*, it is difficult to refuse Connelly's invitation to introspection.

Source: Paul T. Nolan, "*The Green Pastures*," in Marc Connelly, Twayne Publishers, 1969, pp. 79-91.

Adaptations

Connelly wrote and directed the 1936 film *The Green Pastures*, which was produced by Warner Brothers.

Connelly wrote an adaptation of *The Green Pastures* for a television broadcast in 1959.

Topics for Further Study

Connelly's play is a retelling of stories from the Old Testament. In what ways does Connelly's rendition of these well-known stories differ from their traditional telling? To what extent does Connelly's message in this play comply with traditional interpretations of the Old Testament? To what extent does Connelly's play present a different message?

Connelly was a prominent member of the Algonquin Round Table, an informal group of writers, editors, actors, and intellectuals who met regularly at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City. Learn more about the Algonquin Round Table. Who else was associated with this group? What can you learn about some of the other writers? What aesthetic, literary, and cultural perspectives did the Algonquin Round Table generate?

Throughout his career, Connelly worked as a screenwriter, and sometimes as an actor and director, for the Hollywood film industry. Learn more about the film industry during Connelly's career. What significant changes and developments took place in Hollywood during this period? Who were some of the prominent movie stars? What important films were made during this era?

Compare and Contrast

1930s: America is in the midst of the Great Depression, caused by the Stock Market Crash of 1929—the same year in which *The Green Pastures* was first produced. The Great Depression is characterized by the worst unemployment in U. S. history, with about twenty-five percent of eligible workers unable to find jobs.

1990s: America enjoys a period of economic prosperity, characterized by low unemployment, and many middle-class Americans profiting from investments in the stock market.

1920s-1930s: African-American theatrical production is strongly influenced by the Harlem Renaissance movement. Theaters devoted to the black productions are established across the U. S.

1960s-1990s: African-American theatrical production is strongly influenced by the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and '70s. The Black Arts Theater is established in Harlem in 1965.

1860s: In the Post-Civil War era, white Southern resistance to the efforts of Reconstruction leads to the organization of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in 1866. The KKK reaches the height of its membership and activities in the period of 1868-70.

1870s-1980s: Federal legislation becomes involved in efforts to both limit and defend the Ku Klux Klan. In 1869, the KKK is ordered disbanded. Congress attempts to curb KKK activities via the Force Act of 1870, and the Ku Klux Act of 1871. However, these efforts are partially reversed in 1882, when, in the case of the *United States vs. Harris*, the Supreme Court rules that the Ku Klux Act of 1871 is unconstitutional.

1920s: Re-organized in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan enjoys renewed participation, with as many as five million members. The burning cross becomes the symbol of the KKK.

1930s-1940s: During the Depression era, KKK membership sharply declines, and the organization is disbanded in 1944.

1960s: In response to the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement to integrate the South, as well as new federal legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the KKK is once again revitalized. In Alabama, after the murder of a civil rights worker and subsequent arrest of four Klan members, President Lyndon B. Johnson makes a television address denouncing the KKK.

1980s-1990s: The Ku Klux Klan begins to form a coalition with other hate groups and white supremacist and anti-federalist organizations, such as the Neo-Nazis.

What Do I Read Next?

Voices Off-Stage: A Book of Memoirs (1968), by Marc Connelly, is Connelly's autobiographical account of his life on Broadway and in Hollywood.

Marc Connelly (1969) by Paul T. Nolan provides discussion of nearly all of Connelly's major works to the late 1960s.

"De Lawd": Richard B. Harrison and The Green Pastures (1986) by Walter C. Daniel is an account of the history of Connelly's play, as produced in the early 1930s. The discussions focuses on actor Richard B. Harrison, whose role as God ("De Lawd") in the play contributed in no small measure to its success on the stage.

The short story "Coroner's Inquest" (1930) by Marc Connelly won an O. Henry Award.

Southern Sketches, "Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun" (1928) by Roark Bradford is the retelling of Bible stories through African-American folklore and inspired Connelly to write *The Green Pastures.*

Further Study

Baker-Fletcher, Garth, ed., *Black Religion after the Million Man March: Voices on the Future*, Orbis Books, 1998.

This book is a collection of articles discussing the role of religious life in African-American politics and thought after the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

Bascom, William, *African Folktales in the New World*, Indiana University Press, 1992.

Bascom's book is a collected discussion of African-American folktales derived from traditional African folktales. It serves as a useful counterpoint to Connelly's representation of African-American interpretations of the Bible in terms of folk narrative.

Bryan III, J., *Merry Gentlemen (and One Lady)*, Atheneum, 1987.

This work is a cultural history of the Algonquin Round Table, an informal affiliation of writers, artists, and intellectuals in New York City with whom Connelly was associated.

Filler, Louis, ed., *American Anxieties: A Collective Portrait of the 1930s*, Transaction, 1993.

Filler provides a cultural history of the era in which Connelly wrote. The collections are from several historians.

Hurston, Zora Neale, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Harper-Perennial, 1991.

This book has come to be considered a classic work of African-American folklore in the South, as collected by novelist and anthropologist of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston. It includes a forward by celebrated African-American poet and novelist Maya Angelou.

Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Duke University Press, 1990.

Lincoln and Mamiya present a history of the role of religion in African-American culture, thought, and politics.

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Nolan, Paul T., *Marc Connelly*, Twayne, 1969, pp. 79-83.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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