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ARTICLE

# Lynn Riggs's Comedies

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The Cherokee Nation playwright Lynn Riggs (1899–1954) was recognized in his day primarily as a comic dramatist.[1] His comedies appeared on Broadway and college campuses and in Little Theatres, repertory houses, and summer stock.[2] They earned him a good income, for a time, and helped make him famous, a presence in society columns as well as on drama pages. Much of his status owed to *Russet Mantle*, which triumphed on Broadway in 1936 before playing in venues around the country. Several earlier plays had signaled Riggs's comic talents: the unpublished apprentice play *Cuckoo* (1922), *Knives from Syria* (1925), *Roadside* (1930), and *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931). All five plays adapt venerable comic traditions, the modernist revamping of which also engaged, for example, Eugene O'Neill, foremost in Riggs's esteem among his contemporary dramatists.[3] Riggs's comedies also link their author to other comic Indigenous writers from his birthplace in Indian Territory, including Alexander Posey (Creek Nation; 1873–1908) and Will Rogers (Cherokee Nation; 1879–1935); to Indigenous comedians from Charlie Hill (Oneida Nation; 1951-2013) to the 1491s; and to Indigenous dramatists of the present day such as Larissa FastHorse (Sicangu Lakota)

and Drew Hayden Taylor (Curve Lake First Nation Ojibway).[4] We build here on our own recent publications and on foundational scholarship by Craig Womack, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation), and Kirby Brown (Cherokee Nation) that focus on Riggs's bleaker and more violent Indigenous-specific plays. We propose here a second, parallel artistic trajectory for Riggs that moves to, through, and past *Russet Mantle*, his most conventional comedy and his most successful Broadway production. By expanding the current academic view of the first professional Indigenous dramatist's career, we begin to account for the full range of his artistic labor and dogged attempts to find a voice, including a comedic one, that appealed to a broad audience; to situate Riggs more precisely in Native American and US literary histories; and to respond to Vine Deloria Jr's (Yankton Dakota) lament "that the humorous side of Indian life has not been mentioned by the professed experts in Indian Affairs" (146) by enshrining in the critical record Riggs's sense of humor.

*Russet Mantle* almost did not make it into rehearsal. In December 1935, years into the Depression, a "broke" Riggs had to ask his loyal friend Joan Crawford for a loan of $2,500—more than $55,000 in 2024 currency—to help finance the production (Riggs to Crawford).[5] Thanks in part to Crawford's generosity, *Russet Mantle* opened at Broadway's Theatre Masque on January 16, 1936, with Cherokee actress Evelyn Varden (1893–1958) in the important role of Susanna Kincaid. Riggs was not in the audience. The actress, artist, labor activist, suffragist, and Provincetown Player Ida Rauh, an enduring ally and patron, attended in his place. One week later, Riggs checked out of the Hotel St. Moritz at 50 Central Park South—"New York's most continental hotel," according to the syndicated columnist George Tucker—just down from 55th Street, which had become "something of a nocturnal parade ground for celebrities" ("Man"). He boarded the luxurious 20th Century Limited at Grand Central Terminal, no doubt treading the red carpet that the line unfurled for travelers, bound for his home in Santa Fe.

Sometime that day, Riggs sent a hastily written note to Barrett Clark, his editor and manager at Samuel French, expressing satisfaction with reviews of *Russet Mantle*

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by *New Masses*' Stanley Burnshaw and the *New Yorker*'s Robert Benchley (Letter to Clark). Burnshaw had judged the play a "tragicomedy" distinguished by "so subtle an interweaving of tragedy and laughter that it emerges essentially as a work of deep seriousness" (28). Benchley had praised "the superlative quality of [Riggs's] comedy" and declared Riggs "one of the best writers of comedy in the country." *Russet Mantle*, he claimed, was "one of the best-acted plays in town, and [. . .] one of the funniest" (26). Others agreed. In the *New York Times*, Brooks Atkinson applauded the play's "pure comedy" (Review of *Russet Mantle* 15); an unsigned piece in *Time* gushed, "playwright Riggs, hitherto noted for poetic horse operas like Green Grow the Lilacs, simply flabbergasted Broadway by revealing an unsuspected talent for Grade A comic characterization" (Review 42). *Russet Mantle* ran for 117 performances, nearly twice as many as *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the "horse opera" that Rodgers and Hammerstein would adapt as *Oklahoma!* in 1943. Riggs was at the apex of his career and had good reason to hope that his star would continue to rise. He promptly settled his debt to Crawford.

Yet *Russet Mantle* does not figure in popular or academic histories of Riggs. Neither does *Knives from Syria* or *Roadside*, both of which were widely performed. The popular narrative instead remembers Riggs for his involvement with the spectacularly successful *Oklahoma!*, a play he did not write. *Green Grow the Lilacs* becomes a failed production with a charmed afterlife. But *Lilacs* was neither Riggs's first Broadway outing nor his introduction to New York audiences—Riggs's Broadway premiere, *Big Lake*, and *Roadside* ran for 11 performances in 1927 and 1930, respectively—and it fared well in its own right. It ran for a respectable 64 performances before the Theatre Guild dispatched it on a well-received two-month, seven-city tour of the Midwest. These productions netted Riggs $11,222, approximately $230,000 in 2024 currency (see Samuel French). *Lilacs* would be revived through the late 1960s, coast to coast, by

professionals, amateurs, and students. One looks askance, therefore, at reviewers of the 1951 Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*, who chose to recall *Green Grow the Lilacs* as a "flop" (Peet) that "caused hardly a ripple" (Monahan 67) and "ran but 64 performances, despite a heavy cast" (Murphy F5). Even today, theatergoers are most likely to encounter Riggs's name on promotional material for *Oklahoma!*: by contract, Riggs receives credit on all posters and playbills for the musical *Lilacs* inspired. If this show of respect testifies to the Guild's, and Rodgers and Hammerstein's, decent treatment of Riggs, it also bolsters the popular perception of him as a catalyst for successful drama, rather than a creator.

The scholarly narrative concentrates on *The Cherokee Night*, but also *Green Grow the Lilacs*, with numerous publications, our own as well as Chadwick Allen's, Brown's, Justice's, Jace Weaver's, and Womack's, for example, dedicated to the former and Jenna Hunnef's to the latter but with a significant historical and political link established between the two.[6] The presence of *The Cherokee Night* in the conversation has produced important if selective insights into Riggs's place in dramatic history. The two modern editions of Riggs's drama reinforce this circumscription. Weaver's 2003 edition places *Lilacs* alongside *The Cherokee Night* and the previously unpublished but artistically satisfying *Out of Dust*. Of this triad, only *Green Grow the Lilacs* fared well in its own time. *The Cherokee Night*, Riggs's most experimental work, played roughly twenty-seven times in his lifetime, with fourteen of those performances taking place in repertory at Jasper Deeter's avowedly anti-commercial Hedgerow Theatre in rural Pennsylvania. The Federal Theatre Project, freed by liberal government from anxieties about profit, funded another ten or so. Atkinson, the sole New York critic willing to make the trip south to the Hedgerow, denounced "the clutter and torture of [the play's] succession of scenes" and accused Riggs of indulging "presumptuous artistic tenets" (Review of *The Cherokee Night* XI). William F. McDermott, the drama critic for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, stands alone among contemporaries in anticipating the future attention the play has received: he praised *The Cherokee Night* as having "sound, intrinsic value" and "power and a kind of rude beauty that lies in strength of feeling"

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(1). The Theatre Guild dropped *Out of Dust* after a one-week tryout. It, too, has not been revived on stage, although a television adaptation aired in May 1959 in season 3 of the CBS series *Playhouse 90*.

The title of our 2024 Broadview edition—*Lynn Riggs: The Indigenous Plays*—captures our interest, shared with Allen, Brown, Hunnef, Justice, and other scholars in Native American and Indigenous studies, in the Indigenous content and contexts of Riggs's plays. We selected plays that "foreground Indigenous history (*The Cherokee Night*), politics (*The Year of Pilar*), and families (*The Cream in the Well*) in ways that Riggs's other plays do not" (Cox and Pettit, Introduction 25). In January 1941, well after the final documented performance of *The Cherokee Night* in 1936, *The Cream in the Well* opened at the Booth Theatre. The last of Riggs's Broadway plays, it closed after three weeks and has never been revived. Consensus found the author of *Russet Mantle* and other comedies wanting as a tragedian; no less an eminence than Eleanor Roosevelt framed the point tactfully in her syndicated column when she admitted to finding *The Cream in the Well* "at moments . . . a little too tragic" and "wish[ing] that there had been a few light touches here and there" (4). Ira Wolfert disparaged the play as "sand in everybody's coffee," while acknowledging it as "a step in the direction of the creation of a new literature" (10). Arthur Pollock compared it unfavorably to *Russet Mantle*, calling it an "unfortunate" effort in which Riggs "strums tediously on one string" (E6); and Burns Mantle left the play feeling "depressed" and overwhelmed by the "gloom" (49). In the *Times*, Atkinson complimented Riggs's writing but, witheringly, judged the play "without a tangible meaning" (Review of *Cream in the Well* 19). *The Year of Pilar* ran once for two weeks in 1952 at a small theatre in Greenwich Village, fourteen years after Riggs completed a satisfactory draft (see Cox and Pettit, Introduction 58–62). The sole reviewer dismissed it as "dreary and inconsequential" (Shanley 14). For all this, *The Cherokee Night*, *The Cream in the Well*, *Green Grow the*

*Lilacs*, *Out of Dust*, and *The Year of Pilar* constitute the totality of Riggs's drama now in print. We admire Weaver's edition and hope readers will respond well to ours, but we recognize that Riggs's reputation, as it does for many writers, has developed ahistorically.

The five republished plays represent a grimmer and less successful Riggs than the well-received comedies of the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, the academic concentration on *The Cherokee Night*—violent and full of desperate and self-loathing Cherokees—has shaped a perception of Riggs as an unhappy, self-loathing gay Cherokee. But Riggs had a lighter touch in his repertoire as well, introduced with his first play to reach the stage, a "farce-comedy" called *Cuckoo* (1922), written while he was a student at the University of Oklahoma. *Cuckoo* demonstrated Riggs's ear for comic voices and his immersion in comic dramatic traditions. As Daniel Littlefield explains, there was an Indian Territory tradition of humorous dialect letters, with Alexander Posey the most widely known practitioner. Indeed, Littlefield notes that "J. Ojijatekha Brant Sera, a Mohawk, wanted him to take his humor on the stage by joining a program of lectures that Brant-Sera was arranging" (*Alex Posey* 184). Littlefield also identified five authors with Cherokee personas in Indian Territory newspapers between 1878 and 1903.[7] This primarily satirical dialect humor reached its apotheosis in the newspaper columns, radio broadcasts, and books by Rogers. Much of the humor in Riggs's plays derives from the characters' language, rendered carefully in the vernaculars of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory and northeastern Oklahoma.

Riggs joins this regional language and sense of humor with other comic traditions. Comedy, like any viable artistic form, manipulates precedent forms, principles, and tendencies. *Cuckoo*, for example, features an OU fraternity member and a pledge who become embroiled in a rustic love plot in the manner of George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773). The more mature Riggs would prefer ancient formulae that mutated felicitously in the Renaissance. Northrop Frye's 1957 observation that Greek and Roman New Comedy is "the basis for most comedy, especially in its highly conventionalized

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dramatic form, down to our own day," holds up well enough, but Frye's "basis" is not as broad as his argument requires (163). Frye represents New Comedy as preoccupied with courtship and marriage, which it is, sometimes; but the classicist Robert L. Hunter hits closer to the mark when he identifies "the family" as "the basic unit of solidarity" in New Comedy (12). This larger unit pushes the plot toward "the comforting spectacle of the restoration of the status quo after disturbance caused by folly or ignorance" (12). The young couple need not be charming or companionable. Frye does well to pivot to "Shakespearean and other types of romantic comedy," which owe much to the subset of Classical comedies with the plot-points that Frye ascribes to them (167). Riggs works in the tradition of Menander, Plautus, and Terence, but the non-Indigenous formulae that interested him, and many of his contemporaries, date more accurately to the Renaissance.

Thus qualified, our generalizations about comedy owe much to Frye's. Like the plays that most interest Frye, modern comedies move toward the coalescence of twinned worthies and the sidelining of those who would impede them. The worthies tend to be young, lovely, and wealthy or deserving of wealth. Their adversaries, often parents, are usually old and either vexatious or awful. Sexual desire drives plot. Two factors generate conflict: the real or feigned incompatibility of the central couple, and the obstacles to their union erected by elders or competitors in love. When Frye hears "the happy rustle of bridal gowns and banknotes" at endings in Renaissance comedy and the "domestic comedy of later fiction" (44), he incidentally demonstrates the conservatism of the genre, which historically trades in the merger and generational transfer of family fortunes and values propagation, usually among the blue-bloods and ipso facto among heterosexuals. The courtship is fun, but the ideological business of comedy happens after the final curtain. Comedy in its earlier forms is classist, ableist, and heterocentric; the comedy, therefore, often does not survive from generation to

generation.

Like any genre, comedy operates rheostatically, by illuminating or obscuring its conventional elements. To reframe our point, Shakespearean comedy anticipates later drama in its fondness for tinkerings consistent with New Comic marriage-plots but at odds with New Comic attitudes and assumptions about marriage. For example, the New Comic *senex amator* ("old lech") is meddlesome; but Frederick in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Don Juan in *Much Ado About Nothing* are menacing, as are the best-made villains of nineteenth-century US melodrama. The eighteenth-century English genre of the "marital discord comedy"—the term is Robert D. Hume's—recalls *All's Well* but advances the ages of its participants, thus diminishing the fervid, New Comedy-inspired sexuality of straighter Shakespearean comedies while emphasizing other and subtler forms of companionship. The B-plot of *Russet Mantle*, involving Horace and Susanna Kincaid, exemplifies comic marital discord, as does the relationship of the central couple in Riggs's later *Laughter from a Cloud*. O'Neill's *Welded* took this form in the 1920s. Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) is an extreme modern descendent; Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss* (2011) is a tamer and newer one. Comic couples today need not be monied, straight, or interested in marriage or reproduction; but they still need to stumble their way toward a union.

Comedy leaves us with promise, an inversion of "the impression of waste" that A. C. Bradley long identified as "the central feeling" of tragedy (23)—the populous *Cherokee Night* is the best example in Riggs's oeuvre. Post-Classical comic dramatists often attenuate the "promise" at issue, substituting uncertainty about the future for confidence in it. Shakespeare does this in *Measure for Measure*, as Albee does in *Virginia Woolf*. In *A Period of Adjustment*, Tennessee Williams draws attention to the queerness of the male protagonist, patches up his marriage to a woman, and packs the husband and wife off to Texas to raise longhorns, with the protagonist's "buddy" in tow (Williams 169). These plays recall O'Neill's remark on the "happy ending" of *"Anna Christie"*—in which an abused former prostitute agrees to marry a violent and stupid man—as "merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body

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of the sentence still unwritten" (44). Closure in these "meta-comedies" brings anxious resignation or fragile accord, not resolution in any but a formal sense (see Pettit). Riggs toys with such "commas" in *Cuckoo, Knives from Syria, Roadside,* and *Green Grow the Lilacs* by floating the possibility of unsavory afterlives. The juxtaposing of heterosexual relationships and violence that generates tragedy in *Big Lake, The Domino Parlor, The Cherokee Night, The Cream in the Well*, and *The Year of Pilar*, allows Riggs in his comedies to complicate the genre's commitment to gentle futurity.

*Cuckoo* is again a bellwether. The courtship plot is a sham: Doc Helm requires Jay Mason, a pledge to his fraternity, to fake affection for Josie, a "gawky hill-girl" whose mother wants to pawn her off on any old suitor ([1], [10]). Mason obliges; Josie falls head over heels; Helm extricates himself and Mason by telling preposterous tales about Mason, most disturbingly one recounting his having "slashed off" a former fiancée's ear ([23]). If Riggs trolls for laughs from his collegiate audience for much of the play, he chastises them by ending with the "sob[bing]" Josie on stage, "collapsed" between the mercenary parents who have failed to give her away ([25]). The defeated Josie is "waste," not promise. Unlike the moment in which Mason sits on a hot potato, it is not funny.

*Cuckoo* extends a minute or so beyond the "comma" and insults its collegiate audience in the process. Riggs's later efforts are more accommodating and stronger for suggesting rather than staging the transience of romantic expectations. The relative familiarity and tighter form of his darkest comedy, *Green Grow the Lilacs*, make it a more accessible touchstone. One of the "and other plays" in Weaver's edition, *Lilacs* has been covered extensively in academic publications, most recently and significantly by Hunnef.[8] The plot is relatively familiar. Laurey Williams loves Curley McClain, who loves her; the couple squabbles and flirts; and the ghastly villain, Jeeter Fry, threatens and terrifies Laurey. Curley and Laurey's marriage at the entr'acte between scenes 4

and 5 is easy to miss and perhaps obscured to emphasize the panicky state of the frightened couple. During the shivoree in scene 5, a mob drags the couple from their bedroom, still dressed, if barely so in Laurey's case. The villagers hoist the newlyweds onto a haystack, to which the serial arsonist Jeeter sets fire. Laurey and Curley escape the immolation but not the mob. Curley tries to wrestle Jeeter's knife from him. It falls; Jeeter falls on it and dies. Curley is sentenced for murder but released for one night to consummate his marriage. Before his initial imprisonment, Laurey had promised to wait for him whether or not he came back to her. His furloughed return brings a familiar winking jubilation. The play ends with the couple upstairs and Curley singing, a fact to which Aunt Eller calls attention "with delight" (104).

As in the other plays under consideration, Riggs embraces comic form in *Lilacs*. The worthy young couple is sexually motivated and prepared to meet the interruptive challenges of plot. *Lilacs* includes Riggs's most skillful repartee before *Russet Mantle*; and, ultimately, marriage disperses money: Laurey is set to inherit "[a] couple of sections" of "grazin' and timber and plowed land" (78). But Jeeter, the blocking character, is terrifying; and the ambience of rape, murder, arson, smut, and vicious stupidity that he carries with him overwhelms the contextually absurd niceties of closure. He is not just dismissed: he dies violently, with a stake (or knife) in his heart. As in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, perhaps a source here as it seems to have been in *Out of Dust* (see Cox and Pettit, Introduction 36), a couple's coming-together immediately precedes incarceration. "Happily ever after" means sex, a song, a send-off, and a jail cell. Laurey is free but only to wait among the locals who have participated in her violent humiliation. Riggs directs us to ponder the characters' future, which the heartache and melancholy of the title song—sung softly by Curley as the play closes—suggests will be unpleasant or worse.

*Lilacs* is Riggs's most extreme modification of comedy. It extends an experimental period that *Cuckoo, Knives from Syria* and *Roadside* initiate and *Russet Mantle* continues, albeit more conservatively and, box office data suggest, more palatably. The one-act *Knives from Syria* premiered at Santa Fe's Rialto Theatre in May,

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1925, on a three-play bill that featured Witter Bynner's *The Little King* and Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook's *Suppressed Desires* (a marital discord play). Riggs, a last-minute stand-in, played the hired man, Charley. Rauh directed. The inclusion of *Knives* in the bill attests to Rauh's faith in the young playwright: she booked, cast, and began rehearsing the play before Riggs completed it (see "Players" 3). As in many of Riggs's plays, *Roadside* and *Russet Mantle* included, women drive the action. When the curtain rises, the "still definitely young" widow Mrs. Buster and her eighteen-year-old daughter, Rhodie, are discussing two men vying for the younger woman (193): Charley, a laborer much older than Rhodie (and three years younger than Mrs. Buster), and an unnamed Syrian peddler, her strong preference for a suitor despite her mother's objections. Charley enters after surviving an attack by a knife-wielding bandit. After he retreats to the barn, the peddler arrives, his "black mustache" identifying him as a stereotypical melodramatic villain and his red bandanna matching Charley's description of his assailant's garb (201).[9] His down-market Othello schtick—he has traveled widely and seen much—seduces Rhodie; his comments on the utility of knives in domestic disputes alarms her mother, as, in *Cuckoo*, Helms's canard about Mason's attack on his fiancée alarms Josie's mother. Mrs. Buster, once an obstacle to her daughter's union with the peddler, now practically throws Rhodie at him—again recalling *Cuckoo*. She is motivated by fear and self-interest, not concern for a daughter for whom she demonstrates little fondness.

The peddler exits, and Charley returns with the news that he has found and beaten the bandit, a neighbor playing a practical joke, not the peddler. Mrs. Buster, to whose appearance Riggs devotes considerable attention, is free to indulge her attraction to Charley, who reciprocates. The mother worries that her daughter will "hate" her for authorizing an unsavory marriage, but Rhodie enthuses: "I won't even remember you and Charley a-slavin' here together. I'll be on the hills *he* told me about.

I'll be with *him!* We won't never come back!" (207). The stage directions do not call for a slammed door; no director would stage the scene without one.

The lineaments of comedy are evident throughout this play, down to the sorting of A- and B-couples—a Plautine move replicated by Shakespeare in his derivative *Comedy of Errors* and elsewhere. But the experimentalist Riggs modifies the relative ages of the couples, rethinks youth and propagation, and creates two discrete families rather than one amalgamated one. Most pertinently, the peddler advocates for marital violence; Riggs teased out his depravity when he reprised the character in *Green Grow the Lilacs* as Jeeter's fellow lowlife, name and all. The play's female characters indicate a mild liberalizing tendency. The "lusty widow" character in early modern English comedy is often ridiculed for her status as female, libidinal, and post-reproductive, thus irrelevant to the demands of the genre.[10] Riggs highlights Mrs. Buster's cowardice and underhandedness but does not discredit the attraction she shares with Charley or suggest that she is beyond child-bearing years. Riggs represents Rhodie sympathetically as well: here as elsewhere in his comedies, a sexually enthusiastic young woman merits indulgence, not amendment—no "taming" is in order, again to glance at Shakespeare. There is no reason to believe that the peddler will marry Rhodie, much less love and honor her all the days of his life. *Green Grow the Lilacs* forces us to consider Laurey's future; *Knives from Syria* allows us to imagine Rhodie's.

*Knives* was far more popular than the scholarly record suggests. In her tabulation of Riggs's staged plays, Phyllis Braunlich, working with limited resources, noticed only the Santa Fe premiere (see 202). We have identified twenty-four productions comprising roughly forty-three performances in twenty-eight venues, two countries, sixteen states, and Washington DC (see Cox and Pettit, Appendix B 319–21). The play was staged on thirteen college campuses and one military base and by community groups, as well as at a high school and a Baptist church. It was included in the American College Players' 1954 English tour, shortly after Riggs's death, and performed the next year by the Au-Ger-Du-Lo Players (Cherokee for masker) at Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation. In 1930, NBC's Miniature

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Theater broadcast a radio production of the play nationwide that was widely noted in the press.

The preponderance of college productions set a precedent that would continue throughout Riggs's career; and the popularity of one-acts in the US since the heyday of the Provincetown Players in the late 1910s and early 1920s must have owed much to the suitability of short plays to amateur productions. In its own right, *Knives* was well suited to these markets, as it evidently was to the high school productions that we have seen referenced but have not tabulated. The melodramatic characters tempt the sort of over-acting that comes easily to apprentice actors; and the mother/daughter sparring would benefit from goofy ad-libbing and exaggerated physicality. From their inclusion of *Knives* in in the 1927 volume of the popular series *One-Act Plays for Stage and Study*, we infer that Samuel French recognized the play's potential for amateur production. Rhodie's insouciance and her flight may have raised an eyebrow among those bound by tradition; but plenty of public libraries purchased the collection, and the organizers of a 1927 "rural talent tournament" in Dane County, Wisconsin, included it in its list of approved plays, recommending it as "very dramatic" ("Good Plays" 41). Riggs knew how to bend convention without breaking faith with audiences.

*Roadside* is a more ambitious play than *Knives from Syria* and was an even more successful one, too. Riggs's "lusty American comedy," as it was billed on a poster for a 1938 Federal Theatre Project revival at the Musart Theatre in Los Angeles, closed after two weeks on Broadway in 1930, notwithstanding its high-profile producer (Arthur Hopkins) and a talented male lead, Ralph Bellamy, who, at age twenty-five, had already played 400 roles on stage and would soon become an in-demand film actor. With the exception of *Russet Mantle*, however, Riggs's comedies are best evaluated as commercial entities by their record of non-Broadway revivals—a yardstick, as it happens, also pertinent to later Indigenous drama, ignored by Broadway in the long

gap between Riggs's *Borned in Texas* (1950), a *Roadside* re-do, and Larissa FastHorse's *The Thanksgiving Play* (2023). *Roadside*'s post-Broadway life was impressive: fifty productions, mostly at small theatres and on college campuses, again omitting high school productions, spanning the years 1931 to 2001 (see Cox and Pettit, Appendix B 323–25).

The play's rowdy rambler protagonist, Texas, was tailor-made for a period in US dramatic history that valued conventionally handsome leading men. His match, Hannie Rader, a "buxom, well-made girl about twenty" (8) offered the scopic appeal familiar in the theatre and film of Riggs's day and beyond. The play's lingering popularity in the 1970s and 1980s suggests that it remained palatable to progressive theatre-audiences during feminism's second wave; its disappearance after 2001 also tracks with the history of our cultural reckonings with gender and race. *Roadside* is Riggs's most physical comedy, long on sight gags and openings for ad hoc stage business. The blocking character—Hannie's "little bluish-dried-up" ex-husband, Buzzey Hale (3)—tries his best to exude a forceful masculinity, but a director would err in taking the bait. Rather, he makes us feel sorry for the young woman who married him and impressed by her good sense and fortitude in divorcing him.

The play is set in 1905, on the eve of Oklahoma statehood, as Hannie travels through Indian Territory in a wagon with her father, Pap Rader. Buzzey has left his farm in pursuit of Hannie. He thinks of himself as a suitor, but Riggs makes him a de facto senex. (The "good-natured" Pap doesn't qualify for the position.) Black Ike and Red Ike, Tweedledums who have quit their job as Buzzey's farmhands because they miss Hannie, join them. News reaches the group that the "wild and reckless" roustabout Texas has been arrested in nearby Verdigris for public drunkenness (23). Responding to this indignity, Red Ike reports that Texas has "kicked the jedge offen the bench and made jist plum hash outa the courtroom first 'fore they could get him in the calaboose" (24). Moments later we hear Texas's voice "off back" (26), from which station he begins his ambling cross into the playing area, after the manner of entrances in Classical drama.[11] The Marshal soon follows. The authorities return Texas to jail a few times, but

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he keeps finding his way out, all the while consolidating his hold over the Marshal, a decent ex-farmer whom Buzzey has manipulated. Exasperated and impressed by his on-again, off-again prisoner, the Marshal quits. Buzzey is humiliated, vanquished, and abandoned. He remains, however, tending a dwindling fire overnight, the unsubtle stage directions inform us. His effectual ostracization is accented by the play's setting in Indian Territory, home to the "wild ingerns" that Buzzey fears (12), like other white characters that Riggs will mock in *Russet Mantle* and elsewhere. Texas's last words to Buzzey, "I bet you wish you was us" (157), perfectly express comedy's ageism and its yoking of selectivity and comeuppance. Texas takes charge of the wagon that he will drive, thus effecting the comedy's generational transfer of goods; Pap and the Ikes climb in, too. As the Marshal watches them exit, "a slow admiring grin comes over his face" (158). He has seen a good show, too. Buzzey stands there, crushed.

The community has been reconstituted, tilted young, and sent south, "bound fer the [Texas/US] border" (131). Closure's melding of dispersive and coalescent energies amplifies commentary on land-ownership discernible in *Knives from Syria* and most evident in *Green Grow the Lilacs*, notably in Aunt Eller's "dirty ole furriners" speech to locals and the crowd's insistence that "I'm jist plumb full of Indian blood myself" (103). Although Riggs does not identify Mrs. Buster and Rhodie in *Knives* as Cherokee, he likely intended them to be: his Cherokee mother's family name was Buster, and a Roda Buster owned an allotment close to hers outside of Claremore, Indian Territory.[12] The peddler, however, is an interloper, both by trade and by the Syrian origin that becomes epithetic ("Syrian Ped[d]ler"). The relatively young and racially mixed couple leaves Oklahoma without any clear settlement of property, thus, in comic terms, any stable future. The older couple remains, with Mrs. Buster's allotment presumably secure. The dispersal of youth and the legitimation of age is a neat act of inversion. Coalescence remains; but, as in the marital discord plays, it is enacted by grown-ups—and, in this

case, one or maybe two citizens of a tribal nation.

No such ambiguity obtains in *Roadside*. Hannie's family, like Texas and like the peddler in *Knives*, is definitionally itinerant: they all pass through Indian Territory but are not "of" it. As, above all, a Texan, Texas could still be Cherokee. Riggs, however, does not point to that possibility, as he does in *Knives* and would do, more openly, in *Green Grow the Lilacs*. Texas, the place, was a white-governed colonial state that shared a border with Indian Territory. Texas's (the character's) regional pride and stereotypical fondness for tall tales, brawling, and gun-slinging suggest an affiliation with his birthplace. His origin and his transiency remind readers and viewers that Indian Territory is not his home. Tribal national law rewires comic convention, which makes property-transfer a (literal) vehicle of dispersal for the reconfigured family. Riggs does not portray the Indigenous residents of Indian Territory, but they are essential, to use the word narrowly, an ambience, not a presence.

Riggs conceptualizes Hannie and Texas's exit and pending nuptials as in some general sense positive, but their implied future recalls Rhodie and the peddler's elopement, with allowance for the differences of artistry evident in the two plays. Hannie Rader is a well-drawn, vibrant character, smart, vociferous, and full of bravado. Texas is a hunk with a short fuse, no doubt diverting in the right performance at the right cultural "moment," but most useful as a foil to Hannie. The audience never doubts her suasive superiority. Following a stichomythic exchange of complaints and insults, Hannie "slowly" advances toward Texas and speaks at length. "I'm *th'ough* with you," she perorates, "I thought mebbe yer head wasn't quite as thick's a board. Now I know it's thick's the Rocky Mountains—and then some!" The fusillade leaves Texas "amazed" (106). He cannot compete, as his earlier acknowledgement that she is "too damn smart" assured us would be the case (44).

Their imbalance disrupts comic form and encourages questions about futurity that comic drama usually elides. In the well-stocked tradition of Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedick in *All's Well*, William Congreve's Mirabel and Millamant in *The Way of the World* (1700), and, grotesquely, Albee's George and Martha, Hannie and Texas

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squabble entertainingly. But comedy's "witty couples" are marked by an equivalence of speech, the harbinger of more intimate forms of intercourse but pathetic in implying a durable equality that marriage seldom affords. Riggs's couple takes the test: Hannie passes, Texas fails. In act 2, with Hannie offstage, Texas lays into Pap and Buzzey for conspiring to return him to the Marshal. "I'm gonna take Hannie away with me," he blusters, "I'll put her under one arm and claw my way to clear down in the Verdigree bottom some'eres outa sight, whur I c'n have her all by myself—and *I don't know* after that!" Pap doesn't like Texas's odds, but Texas presses his attack: "She'd kick you both in the pants if I told her to, and lay down and let me walk on her. (*Vulgarly*.) Well, mebbe I don't mean *walk* on her" (66). *Roadside* cannot accommodate Texas's attempt to serve both as the melodramatic villain and savior.

Hannie hears Texas's fusillade from the wagon and reenters in high dudgeon. The women who played her and the audiences that heard them must have relished her bravura assault, which culminates: "Whyn't you beat it up the road, and find a place that ud suit you better? They ain't nuthin' here that's in yore style. And they ain't a soul here that wouldn't like to cut you up and feed you to the coyotes—if the coyotes could stand it. Personally I'd ruther have a nice big piece of a striped skunk! Beat it, I said!" (69–70). Texas hushes up and will soon "beat it" with the Marshal, pliantly. "This is the first time I been knocked holler by a female," he complains; "Kinda gits a feller down in the mouth" (80). All the while, however, readers and viewers know that the two will end up together. Texas will be justified in regarding himself and Hannie as "sump'n alike" (120), even if he cannot quite put his finger on the "sump'n."

A common attitude toward life, rather than verbal parity, binds the two: they both disdain laws, rules, and norms. Texas's admission that he "hates rules" well suits a strong-minded woman who has slipped her matrimonial bonds cavalierly as well as sympathetically. We have already heard that Texas had "kicked the jedge offen the

bench." A rustic Hercules or Old West folk hero, he has "[torn] the roof offen [the] jail" (93) in which he cannot therefore be incarcerated. Texas is sheepish after admitting to this impressive act of destruction. Hannie, present at his hearing, is inspired by it. In a farcical scene rich in opportunities for comic acting but sobering in its implications, outbursts by Hannie and other spectators render the judge apoplectic. "Pounding" his gavel on his desk, he "wildly" addresses the room, hollering "shet up . . . quit it!," then, "fiercely," "Shet up!" (99). With "icy rage," he descends to the floor; passes the gavel to Hannie ("*You* run this court, you're so *smart*!"); and "hobbles out angrily" (100). Hannie asks, rhetorically, "What's the matter with *that* ole mustard plaster?," then continues in "high humor":

> Well, you heared whut he said! "Run this court yerself," didn't he? That ud be a good un! I'd do it right! I'd tear up the courtrooms and burn down the jails. I'd turn all the prisoners loose, let 'em run hog-wild. I'd give 'em money, I'd show 'em the road! That's the kinda jedgin' I'd do! . . . I'd scalp all the guards, th'ow the marshals in the crick... I'd burn all the law books and start over. (100)

Hannie ideologizes the anarchy endemic to farce. Her histrionic fervidity recalls the anarchist manifestos of the 1910s and the rantings of Alfred Jarry's King Ubu, while anticipating the anarchism of Azdak, the judge in Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. But, as Riggs's legitimation of a Communist vagabond in *Russet Mantle* will suggest, Riggs could tack left politically without commercial risk. The inclusion of the scene in French's series *Scenes for Student Actors* (1937) suggests the marketability of verbal mayhem, not the frisson of sexed-up anarchy.

The scene initiates the coalescence of the play's central couple. Texas, chastised by Hannie's tongue-lashing, rallies. While Hannie continues her tirade, he grabs the Marshal's pistol, threatens to shoot him, then heads for the exit, determined to put Hannie and Indian Territory behind him. He has not realized that Hannie has acted out of desire or love for him. She tells him. Slowly he gets it. More squabbling looms, but lust and a spirit of adventure bind them. Like O'Neill's Anna Christie, and like Rhodie

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Buster, Hannie has partnered with a lout, which despite the laughter risks leaving the audience with Bradley's "impression of waste."

When a play ends without closure, it tempts the audience to imagine afterlives for the characters. In *The Way of the World*, William Congreve gestured at the disconnect between comic closure's fantasy of companionate marriage and the reality of women's status in an androcentric culture. The lead woman, Millamant, knows that a smitten and capable woman can "dwindle into a wife," that is, that wives, "dwindled" once by marrying, can be "dwindled" repeatedly by marriage (380). Riggs knows that, too, and the prevalent violence in his heterosexual pairings does not let us forget it. The difference between *Roadside* and *Knives from Syria* concerns craft, not attitude, and the relative expansiveness of shorter and longer plays. *Roadside*, a radical play in its apparent espousal of anarchy, is more durably so in its implicit questioning of comedy's central tenet: the myth of "happily ever after" among couples unblessed by good luck or by the time, money, capability, or courage to work through the complexities of marriage, undramatically.

*Russet Mantle* represents the high point of the main and most successful trajectory of Riggs's career. Riggs connected the play to *Knives* by dedicating it to Rauh, who was then living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Riggs set his play. The transplants Horace and Susanna Kincaid had retired to a ranch "a few years" before the action starts (78). There, Horace worries about the stock market that once served him well. Susanna, a self-described "dreamer" (75), wonders if she should have married Larry, the idealist romantic partner of her youth. The Kincaids do not have children, but their marriage is melancholic, not tumultuous like the marriage of the childless George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The arrivals of and the prompt hints of intimacy between Kay Rowley, their niece, and John Galt, a Communist poet, remind Susanna and Horace of their own discontent while also distracting them from it. They negotiate

the emotional landmines around them with greater dexterity than Albee's George and Martha, themselves already weighted with trauma. The pregnancies (Kay's and probably Manuelita's) in *Russet Mantle*, however, are not imaginary, as Martha's was. The generation gap yawns in both plays, but Riggs draws humor from the responses by the older Anglo characters to the younger generation's and the servant class's casual licentiousness. Kay and John's mutual affection and their intermittent displays of significant incompatibility drive the play towards both promise and waste. Riggs keeps the audience in suspense until the final moments, when comedy (promise) triumphs over tragedy (waste).

Three invocations of Shakespeare encourage a skeptical reading of *Russet Mantle*'s ending. The play's title derives from *Hamlet*, in act 1, scene 1 of which "the morn in russet mantle clad" (181) both vanquishes the ghost of a controlling patriarch and introduces a course of action that is anything but rosy. An exchange of lines from the tragicomedy *Romeo and Juliet* begins when Kay "mockingly" answers John's "impatient and loud" response to her unannounced entry with "O, speak again, bright angel!" (*Russet Mantle* 66; see *Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.29). When John realizes that the intruder is Kay, he first plays along, then aborts the game by saying, "I see you read ... How are you in 'Much Ado About Nothing?'" (66). This may or may not be John's attempt at a teasing deflation, but Riggs's nod to a play with a disturbing preamble to a putatively satisfactory B-marriage is noteworthy in either case. The couple survives the entanglements of allusion, which nonetheless have made it difficult to ignore John's condescension, his occasional bursts of anger, and his shocked reaction to hints about Kay's sexual portfolio. Insofar as one can split a hair with punctuation, the ending seems a semicolon that a director might press into service as a full stop or an O'Neillian comma—or, better, might hear and honor.

Susanna voices the play's affecting ambivalence and so claims a greater dramatic prominence than comedy usually allows its elders, although Mrs. Buster provides an analogue in Riggs's canon. Susanna facilitates and regrets Kay's pairing with John. Her and Horace's long-ago decision not to have children still provokes

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arguments and, imaginatively, it suggests their indifference to the dictates of comedy. Their entrepreneurial failures mark their inadequacies as comic elders and as settler-colonialists. Susanna raises chickens; Horace grows apples; neither does so well or profitably. They do not belong in what Susanna thinks of as the "wild country" (21) that she inhabits reluctantly, as an adjunct to a man with whom she has never been in love. We empathize with her in scene 2, when she mixes an uncertain flirtation into the pathetic personal history she shares with John, whose (theoretical) ability to respond feelingly is lessened by his knowing that Kay is overhearing their exchange.[13] Like her niece, Susanna is drawn to "wild." Unlike Kay, she cannot experience it.

Susanna's claim to have "many Indian friends in the nearby pueblos" (80) is patronizing, and her sequestering of Native people offstage and their shortage onstage suggest that she comes by her largesse easily. An episode from Riggs's earlier life offers context. In January 1924, the young playwright had witnessed an agitprop Indigenous response to early twentieth-century white tourism in Puebloan New Mexico. Riggs's letter to author and University of Oklahoma English instructor Walter Stanley Campbell and his wife, Isabel Jones Campbell, relates a tale of an excursion to San Felipe Pueblo. After getting stuck in the mud and missing the dance, Riggs and his party arrive and immediately mistake two children playing with drums for a ceremony in a kiva. They depart for Santo Domingo but miss the dance there, too, while witnessing a memorable street-scene: "A tall Indian with a suitcase and a linen duster and an umbrella supplied the fun. He scattered candy to the children and young ones, and cried in Spanish: 'How do you do? You nice Indians. I'm from New York and I think you're so interesting!' And people are fond of believing they have no sense of humor" (Riggs to Campbell). The performer has observed non-Native interlopers and found them ridiculous. The performer of this satire, this one-act street play, has observed non-Native visitors to his home and found their views of Indigenous people worthy of

mockery.[14] The writers of *Reservation Dogs* (2021-2023) find humor in the same place, as in any scene with Kenny Boy (Kirk Fox) or in season 1, episode 3, which opens with a white couple driving in a car and musing on the phrase "Land Back" spraypainted on a road sign.[15] Though Riggs might have already reached the same conclusion, this episode at Santo Domingo gave him insight into how the residents of the pueblos experienced the significant rise of tourism to their homes in the early twentieth century and the often strange, unpleasant, and demeaning assumptions about Indigenous people that those visitors brought with them.

Perhaps drawing inspiration from the Santo Domingan street actor, Riggs also mocks non-Natives for romanticizing the Puebloan people as "nice Indians." After inviting John to stay and help care for the chickens, Susanna tells him that he does not need to lock his door. "Nobody'll come in," she says, "Except maybe an Indian. We have many Indian friends in the nearby pueblos. Sometimes, if we're out, they just come in and sit for hours—till we come back. It's all very friendly" (80). But Riggs also ridicules Effie, Susanna's sister and Kay's mother, for her outrageously reductive and ill-informed views of Indigenous people as bloodthirsty primitives. Effie, a wealthy, vacationing Kentuckian, enters in act 1, affecting a Southern accent that "almost satiri[zes] herself and her Southerness" and sporting an "organdie dress [and] a picture hat" that would have suited Williams's Blanche Dubois in the next decade (12). She promptly asks Kay if she will see "real live redskins" on day one of her visit. Susanna tells her that Indigenous people in New Mexico live in towns, a fact to which Effie objects: "In towns! I thought they lived on the plains. History says that the Indians are inhabitants of the Great Plains region west of the —" (13). To Effie, Indians are "red and bloodthirsty" and "savages" (13). Her "historical" perspective informs her response to the news of Kay's pregnancy: "Someone came in the night. Someone overpowered her! [. . .] Horace, lynchin' is too good for whoever's responsible. You got to organize a lynchin' party at once!" (109). When Horace expresses doubt about where to direct the proposed cohort, Effie suggests targeting an Indigenous man: "What if it was one of those savage Indians—maybe one from Ildefonso?" (109). Conveniently for Effie, a candidate,

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Salvador, has been sitting quietly nearby. He flees in response to her outburst.

Effie's racism indicates a pervasive intolerance to everything "undreamed of in the philosophy" of white upper-crust Louisville society. Her unhinged reaction upon learning that she will soon become a grandmother teases toward excess an older generation's dismay at a younger one's sexual liberation. As obstacles to the young lovers, however, all three mature characters are hapless. Kay and John consummated their relationship immediately upon John's arrival; they have been lovers, as John puts it, "ever since I first came" (113). When Effie awkwardly conflates their sexual relationship with marriage, John responds that it is "much more than that, I imagine" (113). Riggs uses punctuation to highlight the generation gap: John's statement ends in a period; Horace, Susanna, and Effie respond with eleven exclamations interrupted only by two questions from Horace: "Who the hell are you, anyway?" and "Don't you know your place—?" (114). John might ask Horace the same questions: he is neither a believable nor a likable character, nor is he a compelling representative of a revolutionary working-class ideology; but he does, confidently, know who he is and he does realize that his place is not in Horace's world. Effie, Susanna, and Horace conspire to keep the lovers apart; but after some wavering, Kay decides to join John.

Kay's explanation for her decision—"This isn't our world—we didn't make it. We must live in a world that's *our time*" (120)—is the essence of comedy: the effort by a younger generation to find a new, less oppressive world with fewer absurd adults imposing their inflexible morality. Rhodie Buster departs for a new world with the peddler; Hannie Rader leaves her husband to travel through and beyond Indian Territory; Kay and John are already far from their homes and, as the play ends, they will also leave Kay's family. *Cuckoo*'s Josie wants to leave but cannot. The dispersive pattern holds in *Laughter from a Cloud*, a late effort by Riggs to recapture the glorious moment when *Russet Mantle* succeeded on Broadway. Riggs wrote *Laughter* in the late

1940s, following a stint in the Army. He set the play in the Nambe Valley near Santa Fe at the home shared by Lisa Walker and Ann Ellison, her eighteen-year-old daughter. Lisa has left her husband, Cleve; Ann is engaged to a rancher, Mason. Dr. Hank Burbage and his son, Dick, appear; and, in line with *Russet Mantle*, Dick and Ann immediately fall in love and shock the older generation with their physical effusions. Lisa and Cleve reconcile, and Ann breaks her engagement with Mason and leaves with the Burbages to join Dick on an expedition to the Pacific. An effort to launch *Laughter* on Broadway in the summer of 1947 failed after multiple tryouts in the Northeast. *Russet Mantle*'s long period of popularity had ended seven years earlier.

In contrast to the flight from home in these plays, *Lilacs*' Curley and Laurey prepare for the new world of Oklahoma statehood—figuratively, the "beautiful morning" of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*—by marrying and, apparently, deciding to stay in their homeland. It is a more conventional decision that helps explain the play's commercial success. Rodgers and Hammerstein put a happier face—more comedy, less real or latent violence—on heterosexual romance than audiences get from Riggs. Riggs's comedies always have menace, especially the threat of sexual violence against women, bubbling to their surfaces. Many of the laughs he elicits are uncomfortable ones. While Indigenous people of Indian Territory found humor in their lives, as Will Rogers demonstrated throughout his career, the laughter only temporarily distracts from the weight of a traumatic history and its legacy as dramatized by Riggs. Riggs might have muted the menace, but it remained as a damper on comedy's conventional promise.

By emphasizing this comic trajectory, the defining trajectory of Riggs's professional life, we lose the salubrious focus on Indigeneity but expand our understanding of the man and his career. But we cannot separate Indigeneity from Riggs and his career, from the funny Riggs or the Riggs who wrote successful comedies and continued to write them because audiences and reviewers liked them. As Drew Hayden Taylor observes,

Native humour comes from five hundred years of colonization, of oppression, of

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> being kept prisoners in our own country. With legalized attacks on our culture, our language, our identities and even our religion, often the only way left for Native people to respond to the cruel realities of Fourth World existence was in humour. Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. It gave us privacy. (69)

Riggs would have endorsed Taylor's observation, we suspect. He might have wanted to write more plays like *The Cherokee Night*, *The Cream in the Well*, and *The Year of Pilar*, and it must have been discouraging to see those plays rejected by producers and in some cases audiences. But he also enjoyed writing comedies. Larissa FastHorse faced a similar dramatic landscape almost one-hundred years after Riggs's own debut on Broadway: *The Thanksgiving Play*, which reached Broadway in 2023, was a comic outing with no Indigenous characters. It ran for fifty-three performances and garnered much praise.

The arrival of *The Thanksgiving Play* on Broadway suggests that US theater may have begun to acknowledge the merit of Indigenous humor, specifically the brand that thrives on mocking non-Native views of Indigenous people and that we see in both Riggs's letter to Campbell and *Russet Mantle*. Riggs opened this door, unmistakably for FastHorse and perhaps for the less commercially successful Taylor and non-dramatic Indigenous comedians like Charlie Hill—see, for example, Hill's response to the question "Can you speak Indian?" ("Can you speak Caucasian?") and the 1491s's skit "I'm an Indian Too," made on the plaza in Santa Fe, or "The Indian Store," which gleefully ridicule non-Native's appropriation of Indigenous identities and lack of knowledge about Indigenous people, respectively.[16] Deloria Jr.'s lament, repeated by Hill at the beginning of his first television appearance on *The Richard Pryor Show*, that white people thought "Indians never had a sense of humor," still resonates.[17] Riggs could create a sense of gloom and desperation on the stage, but he could also make an audience laugh. Indeed, he found more success doing the latter. The Indigenous

and the humorous only briefly cross paths in his plays, but even Hill, after finding his way to Hanay Geiogamah's (Kiowa Nation) Native American Theatre Company at La MaMa Theater in New York and making his "first professional performance" there (Nesteroff, 121), only gained a substantial audience more than twenty years after Riggs's death.[18] FastHorse's comedy premiered on Broadway almost another fifty years later. In this light, the Depression-era *Russet Mantle*—a successful Broadway comedy by an Indian Territory-born Cherokee playwright, a play that satirizes reductive, stereotypical views of Indigenous people—appears even more extraordinary.

*Notes*

[1] We identify Riggs by his citizenship status and other Indigenous writers with tribal nation citizenship in the same way, except when they prefer a different public self-identification.
[2] The Little Theatre movement of the 1910s and beyond championed lesser-known playwrights and local theatres and actors, specifically in opposition to glitzy touring productions. The Hedgerow Theatre, noted below, exemplified the movement and regularly staged Riggs's work.
[3] Riggs praises O'Neill on several occasions in his unpublished correspondence; for a sample, see Cox 3.
[4] See Womack, *Red on Red*; Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*; Brown, *Stoking the Fire*. Womack identifies as Muscogee Creek and Cherokee, but he is not enrolled in either tribal nation.
[5] Here and throughout the article, all currency is in US dollars.
[6] See Hunnef, "Old Song, Rough Music: The Shivoree Politics of Lynn Riggs's *Green Grow the Lilacs*"; Allen, "When a Mound Isn't a Mound, But Is: Figuring (and Fissuring) Earthworks in Lynn Riggs's *The Cherokee Night*"; and Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, which includes a discussion of *Green Grow the Lilacs*.
[7] See Littlefield and the edited collection by Littlefield and Hunter.
[8] For recent scholarship on the play, see Joseph Roach, "World Bank Drama" (2007); W. Douglas Powers, "A Cosmogony for the Marginalized: Lynn Riggs, Mythmaking, and Multiracial-Homosexual Apologetics" (2016); Charlotte Canning's *Theatre and the USA* (2023); and "*Green Grow the Lilacs* and *Oklahoma!*" by Carolyn Gage.
[9] For the centrality of "stock characters"—and "stereotyped plots"—to New Comedy, see Hunter 59–82.
[10] See, for example, the Widow Blackacre in William Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* (1676); Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World*; and, later, Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Aphra Behn regards the tradition skeptically in

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*The City-Heiress* (1682). For antecedents in Chapman, Middleton, and other Renaissance dramatists, see Panek, especially 77–123, 157–201.

[11] Characters in 5th- and 4th-century BC Greek drama entered the *orchēstra*, or playing area, through *eisodoi* located at what we would now call upstage left and upstage right. See Storey and Allen: "characters [would] take a while to make their entrance, and would have been visible for some time before they actually set foot in the *orchēstra*. These arrivals are generally announced by the chorus or another character on stage" (28). One imagines the actor Texas making the most of his entry and of the awe of *Roadside*'s dimwitted "chorus" of Ikes.

[12] We thank Jenna Hunnef for this observation.

[13] Compare to the denigration of desiring women in early comedy (see note 4, above). Atkinson's description of Susanna as "a silly chatterbox with an empty head" (Review of *Russet Mantle* 15) may have captured Varden's performance of earlier scenes but could have applied to her intimate scene with John only at cost to what Burnshaw plausibly found the production's "tragicom[ic]" status (28). See also Mantle: "Varden is nicely cast as a disillusioned lady with a lost romance that troubles her dreams" (23).

[14] When an Indigenous person, "an old chief," visits New York and receives a dinner invitation from a white man, Deloria, Jr. suggests, the circumstances retain the same comic potential (*Custer* 161).

[15] *Reservation Dogs* was created by filmmaker and founding member of the 1491s (see below) Sterlin Harjo (Seminole Nation of Oklahoma) and Māori filmmaker Taika Waititi.

[16] "I'm an Indian, Too" is a song written by Irving Berlin for the 1946 musical *Annie Get Your Gun*.

[17] Hill saw Deloria, Jr., promoting *Custer Died for Your Sins* on *The Dick Cavett Show*. See Nesteroff, 86, 106. For Hill's joke about "speaking Indian," see his performance on *The Richard Pryor Show*.

[18] For Hill's relationship with La MaMa, see Nesteroff, 106-8 and 121-3.

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