



VANDAMM STUDIO, NEW YORK

At the left are Helen Westley as Aunt Eller and Franchot Tone as Curley in «Green Grow the Lilacs». On the opposite page are some of the stagings of the play produced by the Theater Guild at the Guild theater in New York

## A Pulitzer possibility

Lynn Riggs, ex '23, has arrived on Broadway, and with a smash.

*Green Grow the Lilacs*, the play he wrote in Italy on a Guggenheim fellowship, has been acclaimed as one of the plays of the year, as produced by the Theater Guild of New York at the Guild theater under the direction of Herbert J. Biberman.

*The Billboard*, speculating on the possibilities of the awards for the Pulitzer prize in drama for the best original serious play produced during the year on an American theme by an American author, mentions Mr Riggs' play as one of eight plays now running as being eligible.

The play has received foremost attention from all critics. Most of the praise is fulsome. *The New York Times* said Mr Riggs had arrived. A combination of Riggs, the Theater Guild and Mr Biberman's direction guaranteed Broadway recognition.

*Green Grow the Lilacs* is concerned with Indian Territory thirty years ago. In order that he might obtain the correct setting and reproduce the atmosphere of that period, Mr Biberman spent some time in Oklahoma last summer. At Vinita and Claremore, the locale of the play, play parties were produced for his benefit. Thorough research went into the production of the play on Mr Biberman's part. It was a great play if given right interpretation. And that is what it got.

Mr Riggs has warm friends among

the critics—and some hostile. But there is no doubt about it, the play is a Broadway success. And the drawbridge is rarely down over the moat that bars access to Broadway to a provincial.

The *Times* review of the play by J. Brooks Atkinson was one of the more cautious. "Mr Riggs has something to learn about the theater, but he knows the folks of the cornfields and the prairies. His *Green Grow the Lilacs* which the Theater Guild produced in high fettle last evening (January 26) is less a play than a hale and hearty narrative of loves, jamborees and neighborly skirmishes out in Indian Territory in 1900. Being a troubadour of the cornfields Mr Riggs constantly sets his cowboys and milkmaids to singing broad, swinging ballads. . . . The characters are alive," Mr Atkinson says. "*Green Grow the Lilacs* is no parsimonious idyll. Life drips from every fibre in its narrative. When Mr Riggs has learned more about the theater and found a concrete theme he will bring rich material into focus."

Mr Atkinson praises Mr Biberman's direction. "As the director of *Red Rust* and *Roar China*, Mr Biberman has already given evidence of his vitality. Here he does it again. He has animated a script that is obviously loquacious."

Gilbert W. Gabriel in the *American*, says:

"The Theater Guild, having buried its

'isms for the season, sits down to a large barbecue, rodeo and glee-club concert called *Green Grow the Lilacs*, a panorama of the cowboy's lives, a *Porgy* of the Western plains—in short, a folk play. The rub in most folk plays is that they are all folk and no play. . . . Now here comes Lynn Riggs, a later Lochinvar out of the West, with an even simpler (than Hatcher Hughes' *Ruint*) annal six scenes long about the wooing, wedding and shivoreeing of Curley and Laurey, two babes in the prairies. And behind all the wholesale cussedness and whooping and warbling of *Green Grow the Lilacs* there's no doubt that there's a play, even if only a folk play. There's a melodrama, a very 'Nelly, the Beautiful Cow-Girl' and I'm sure the little folks will like it for its purity, the old folks for its old songs between acts, and that there's probably no harm in it this side of the Rio Grande. I'm just one of those oversophisticated grumps of the Atlantic seaboard set who will have to wonder why so much nice writing and handsome producing ever were poured into such a little kinderspiel.

. . . Mr Riggs ranks with O'Neill as a picker of beautiful playhouses."

John Mason Brown in the *New York Evening Post* declared the Guild had gone native. "For Mr Riggs' play is not only an American drama in the ordinary sense of the word, but a homemade folk play that revels—and occasionally excels—in folksiness."



"It is a simple and ingenuous affair; a violent, loamy comedy, full of tall brave words and pungent humors, that runs its melodramatic course to the tune of cowboy songs and country dances in the Indian Territory at the turn of the century, or above the sneering racket of a shivaree. It has a racy vigor that is undeniable and a swing to many of its finely cadenced lines which indicates that it is a poet who has fashioned them. It likewise gives, as few of our plays have succeeded in doing, a refreshing and authentic sense of having sprung from the earth and of belonging to it, and is doubly welcome, therefore, as an attempted escape from the regulation settings of our showshops."

Arthur Ruhl in the *New York Herald-Tribune* properly recognizes Mr Riggs independence of accepted dramatic forms, which, if his principles are sound, should make him the coming American playwright—and if the critics who expect the conventional drama are right, should make him an experimentalist.

"... (It) is in the nature of a dramatic ballad of the old Oklahoma cow-country. Its mood is a mixture of the tenderly lyrical and of hair-raising melodrama. . . . In the nature of things, this particular dramatic form breaks that emotional continuity which the spectator has come to expect in the conventional stage story. . . . The stuff with which the author is dealing is, however, so refreshingly of our American soil and his whole intention so interesting, that one was inclined to give him a good deal of leeway in arriving at the generally unstagy end which he had in view.

An experiment, in a sense, with its novel attempt to transfer the mood and flow of the pioneer folk-ballad to the actual theater, but its moments of excitement and of lyric beauty made it genuinely interesting and, on the whole, a venture that could be described as a success."

Charles Darnton in the *Evening World*, said: "Lynn Riggs catches and reflects the spirit of the people in the Indian Territory of 1900, when it was turning from cattle into farming country. This he has done with the sympathy of the poet rather than the power of a dramatist."

Robert Littell praised the play highly in the *Morning World*:

"(It) is one of the most thoroughly satisfying evenings that the Guild has given us in a long time—full of rich, free humor, salty poetry, and some reckless tenderness that was America's before she was tamed and civilized by fences and mortgages and chain grocery stores. It is admirably directed by Herbert Biberman, and acted by June Walker, Franchot Tone and Helen Westley, not to mention a ranch full of real cowboys, in a way that does one's heart good.

"... The spirit of the frontier is there, not only in the racy, simple language, but in what its people think and do. It is a glorious breath of fresh air, making us who live beside subways long—for 'way down inside us we are still Americans—for something lost out of our lives, something long ago and far away."

Robert Garland in the *New York Telegram*, declared:

"As one good American to another, I venture the opinion that taken by and large, *Green Grow the Lilacs* is wiser and worthier Americana than Mr O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. I'm glad the Guild be-

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by snow or sand, and in winter an astrakhan cap may occasionally be seen on the heads of some.

When the elevated train has passed with its roar, and the sunlight creeps through its patches, the scene takes on an aspect far removed from Manhattan. The smell of the charcoal brazier reaches the nostril, the eyes close, and in a trice the street becomes the crowded bazaars of the East. After all, Manhattan is but one remove away, and not so very different from Damascus or Samarcand.

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## A PULITZER POSSIBILITY

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stirred itself to produce it. But not so glad as Mr Riggs should be."

A two column article in the *Times* was headed "And Now Lynn Riggs. After Several Ventures in the Theater, He Arrives with *Green Grow the Lilacs*." It is a most favorable biographical sketch, in which it is revealed that Mr Riggs is at work on a new play, tentatively titled *The Cherokee Night*, dealing with the passing of the Cherokees. The article quotes Dr Isaac Goldberg in the *Transcript*: "It is a great man, indeed, who has the courage of his exaltations. This is the quiet but unshatterable courage that characterizes Lynn Riggs." The Newspaper Enterprise Association in its weekly drama letter from New York to its clients remarked: "Broadway will probably eat it up."

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## THE MILBURNS

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ed by B. A. Botkin of the English faculty and published by the University Press. John McClure, who is one of H. L. Menckens's favorite authors, praised George's contribution highly in his "Literature and Less" department in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and recommended George's work to the editor of *Mercury*.

Vivien talks some of taking an M. A. next year after she has finished—George talks some of going to New York and taking up a newspaper offer which has been made to him—they talk some of going to Arkansas and living on a farm there (this being his secret ambition)—and they talk some of this and some of that—

But the responsibilities of life are not weighing heavily on either of their shoulders and since the future has always taken care of itself it may continue to do so and so—

Well, the possibility that Norman may keep them remains.

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