



«Rancour» in Santa Fe

BY MILDRED MAXEY, '29

I HAVE always wanted to see the reaction of a playwright tortured by rehearsals of his own play; I have always wanted to see one on the opening night of his play. Now I'm satisfied, for I have just returned from Santa Fe where I worked with the Santa Fe Players in their production of *Rancour*. *Rancour* was written by Lynn Riggs, ex '23, and it was directed by Lynn Riggs and Anna V. Huey. Mr Riggs bore the rehearsals admirably. But the remembrance of the same Mr Riggs clinging modestly to a ladder backstage when the audience clapped and cheered and screamed for "Author!" while we tried to pull Mr Riggs away from the ladder and throw him bodily on the stage, is a great blow to me. I had always imagined that authors floated out from the wings, smiled benignly, bowed graciously and floated back. They don't. They cling to ladders.

One of the nicest things in writing about Lynn Riggs for this magazine is that I don't have to introduce him. Even Emily Post has never been able to do anything about Introductions of Famous People. They are invariably agonizing

to everyone. It is a great relief to realize that the alumni of the University of Oklahoma already know who Lynn Riggs is and what he has done.

All of us are aware that Arthur Hopkins produced *Roadside* and the Theatre Guild *Green Grow the Lilacs*. Most of us have read some of his plays or poetry, and all of us should read more. I am not afflicted with chamber of commerce spirit about the state of Oklahoma when I say that; certainly Lynn is an Oklahoman, and most of his plays are laid in Oklahoma, but the importance in reading him lies in the fact that we all can stand a little poetical stretching now and then.

For a thorough stretching I advise actually producing one of his plays. I speak with the authority of my recent Santa Fe experience. By the opening night we had all achieved a remarkable elasticity. I refuse to be superfluous about Santa Fe, and I would be if I said one word about its exciting charm. Consult any number of books written recently about the country, or talk to anyone who has been there for a respectable length of time, and you will have a

faint idea of what I mean when I say "exciting charm." As a background for the rehearsal and production of a play it is perfect. Few amateur theaters are blessed with directors, cast and audience who are all keenly interested in their theater as an art, and not as an exploitation of local personalities. The Santa Fe Players have thus become, through the very nature of the town and its people, the ideal Little Theater. To an outsider, appearing in one of their shows, the challenge is definite.

The Players have no paid director. A member may assemble a cast and put on a show any time the spirit moves him, providing he gets the consent of the board. Thus the director is always someone who actually enjoys doing it. He selects his own stage manager, electrician, scenic artist, etc. Mr Riggs and Mrs Huey had directed together before, and they had worked out a co-directorship that functions more admirably than any co-anything I've ever seen. Paul Lantz, who recently held an exhibition of his work at the University of Oklahoma, constructed the set. It was a shallow, intimate set, the parlor of an Oklahoma farm house; the wall paper was atrocious, the what-not, the stuffed eagle on the mantel piece, the old organ, the rocking chair were delightful. Some of the most intriguing publicity for the play was done by Spud Johnson, editor of *The Laughing Horse*. He has marvelous ideas of what interviews with members of the cast should contain. One of the most thoughtful articles was written by Alice Corbin, the poet, who at-

One of the most brilliant graduates of the school of dramatic art of the university, Mildred Maxey, '29, achieved the honor of being invited to play a leading role in the Santa Fe Players' production of Lynn Riggs' «Rancour.» In the photograph on the opposite page, from left to right, are: Ray Otis as Hez Breedon, George Gormly as Ned Bickel and Miss Maxey as Dorie Bickel. On this page are Miss Maxey and Mr Gormly. A host of notables participated in the production of «Rancour,» which is Mr Riggs' only «regular» play as regards construction



tended a rehearsal and was moved to tears. Marjorie Latimer, author of *We Are Incredible* and *This Is My Body*, came one night with her husband, Jean Toomer. Evelyn Scott, responsible for *The Wave*, *A Catalogue of Sin*, etc., was asked to do the critique for the paper. The only thing that saved me from perpetual stage fright with all these exciting people milling around was the growing intensity of the play itself; I gradually lost sight of personality during rehearsals.

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Rancour is a play that requires hard work, and absolute sincerity in acting. On the face of it, that statement sounds exceedingly stupid, but there are too many plays that allow false notes in interpretation because they themselves are full of falsities. I have always been appalled at the shoddy craftsmanship allowed in American playwrights. Many of them have a vital sense of the theater; perhaps in the interest of seeing a thoroughly actable play on the stage, we excuse the poor construction and the insensitive characterization. While *Rancour* is Mr Riggs' most conventional work in style and construction, it does not lose any of that fine and subtle attention that he gives to his more stylized plays.

The play is concerned with two people, Ned and Dorie Bickel, who are

chained together by the terrible ingrown love they feel for each other. It is their only point of contact; temperamentally they are wholly unlike. Ned is a pitiful example of the back-wash left by our pioneer fathers; he has no ambition, does not understand the modern world, and demands from it only a gun and a wood in which to hunt. Dorie is ridden by a gnawing, ceaseless desire to "get ahead;" she wants "to have a place, to be something." Their son, Julius, becomes the focal point of their merciless battle of wills, made all the more poignant because Ned is reticent, slow, inarticulate. The parlor of an Oklahoma farm house is the setting for all three acts, but it might have happened in any setting.

As *Rancour* unfolded, as we worked on it from rehearsal to rehearsal, and I saw the drama grow, I became intensely excited by the play. For the first time in my experience of amateur productions, I definitely felt that I was helping to create a production that would rise above the play as literature and emerge on the stage as the essence of theater. It was not the challenging background of Santa Fe, or the cast or the direction alone that lifted me to such an actor's Utopia; it was the script in my hand. Mr Riggs is a realist, but he is a poet as well. His realism does not insist upon a distressing and lifeless copy of nature, but rather upon life heightened and

focused by the conflict of personality. There are moments when Dorie, sharpened by the desire for dominance over Ned and all he represents, says things that carry her and the play and the audience beyond the footlights and into a recognition of universal truths. *Rancour* then becomes true theater. You will find such moments in all of Mr Riggs' plays. They are never mawkish or maudlin; their position in the play is too dramatically sound, their intent too pure, their effect too classic. *Rancour* is among his earliest works; an experienced maturity should bring us the great American play.

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Miss Esther McRuer, '22 arts-sc., who is director of young peoples' work of the National Board of Presbyterian Missions with headquarters in New York City, visited in Norman during the first part of February. In connection with her work, Miss McRuer visited in Ardmore, Hobart, Elk City, Clinton and Oklahoma City.

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An important investigation of steam equipment on Rotary-drilled oil wells directed by W. H. Carson, director of the school of mechanical engineering, is being published by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.