'Needle' Terned Sew-Sew

By JIM BERNHARD

Last Friday and Saturday nights The Rice Players treated their audiences to a seldom recognized rule of orthography: Renaissance farce is a four-letter word.

"Gammer Gurton's Needle," a play which quite obviously deems the scatological of more importance than the eschatological, impressed me as being really not quite worth the Herculean (or should I say Rabelaisian?) efforts which the Players applied to it.

Forewarned Is Forarmed

The audience should perhaps have been forewarned that the Players were confronted with a problem which, in retrospect, might be termed insoluble. It was to produce a play which would simultaneously entertain the Renaissance scholars visiting our campus and the general public. Those who are not familiar with the concept of Renaissance farce, an art form which is not noted for an abundance of works of merit, might understandably have been temporarily stunned by the frequent occurrence of dialogue ordinarily reserved for such places as alley walls.

Literary Significance

Nevertheless, the Players must be congratulated for a first-rate production of a typical farce of literary significance of the era which spawned, among others, such people as William Shakespeare.

The almost indiscernible plot is about a sweet little old lady named Gammer Gurton, who has lost her sewing needle. It is imperative that she find it, since her servant, Hodge, is wearing bottomless trousers.

Skulduggery

A halfwit named Diccon, described as a Bedlam, attempts to stir up animosity between sweet old Gammer and her neighbor Dame Chat by telling each of them the other suspects her of Skulduggery. The result is the expected amount of pandemonium.

Thomas R. Preston's direction resulted in a swift-moving farce, which at times bordered on brilliant situation comedy.

"See, Now"

Joe Binford, as Hodge, was responsible for some of the funniest scenes I have ever witnessed on the stage. His superb "See now" speech should be filmed and put into somebody's archives.

It was also a good night for the Days. Linda Day, as Gammer Gurton, sustained a really wild character throughout the play with high humor. And Deanna Day, as Gammer's neighbor Dame Chat, was beautifully raucous. The uproarious fight scene between these two worthy dames was magnificent, no doubt.

Tongue-In-Cheek

Richard Briscoe, though he played the Bedlam Diccon with perhaps more sanity than was called for, performed his leading role with just the right amount of tongue in his cheek, as well as cheek in his tongue. Asides to the audience actually made me feel that he was taking me into his confidence.

The others — Jim Kuttler as the magistrate, Arnold Victor as the priest, and Suzy Rhodes as the maid-servant — were suitably magisterial, sacerdotal, and charming, respectively.

They were a bit stiffer than we might have liked. But perhaps they were just a little embarrassed, appropriately enough, by the whole thing.

Delightful Madrigals

It should be remarked that the play was preceded by some delightful madrigal singing by some delightful madrigal singing by Phyllis Skaff, Ann Vickers, Joe Rider, and Fred Kracke. A chamber orchestra added to the festivity with some pleasant Renaissance airs. This orchestra was composed of David Miller, Mike Dyer, Carolyn Wilson, Franklin Baldwin and Phil Hughes.