

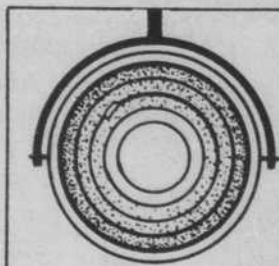
Jesse and the Bandit Queen

Psychological heaviness dulls enjoyment

In this post-Freudian era the exploration or depiction of psychological realms recurs persistently in drama. Not that pre-Freudian writers did not deal with the psyche, but they did not identify it as such and were usually more subtle. The conscious insistence on the importance of the psychological level of a character can lead to the exclusion of other facets of drama — a highly difficult technique which carries the danger of boring the audience. David Freeman has fallen into this trap.

Freeman's play, *Jesse and the Bandit Queen*, opened last Wednesday in the Arena Theatre. The historical basis of the play, the relationship and lives of Jesse James and Belle Starr, is interesting enough and Freeman himself is not without some skill and talent. He begins his psychological drama with the "dead" Jesse and Belle discussing the realities and legends surrounding their deaths. The monologues are disjointed if

one does not have any background knowledge, but they are eventually explained without being detrimental to an understanding of the play.



By M. A. MATHIE

Freeman's application of enacting the past is generally effective, and the decision to have only two actors in the cast, the main characters also playing the secondary roles, counts as a strength of the play. Another positive aspect is that the sudden shifts of time and space are not confusing.

The problems occur with the lack of concrete plot filled in by over-symbolization. Freeman is exploring the effects of the dime-

store legends on the people they are built around and the effects of the two outlaw personalities on each other. However, rather than seeing these themes develop

through the action, the messages are thrown at the audience by overdrawn metaphors and the direct statements of the actors. The interchanging of the characters (which is supposed to be taking place) does so sporadically. However, the theme does not appear between the spurts of revelations where the characters throw accusations at each other. Jesse's "identity crisis" has the same problem. He appears to be quite sure of himself, even among the obvious symbols of uncertainty (like his initials placed on his belongings), and it is mainly through Belle's declaration of the problem that one knows there is a problem.

As for comedy, *Jesse and the*

Bandit Queen makes few attempts at humor, and those it does make are rarely funny. The sexuality portrayed is more idiotic and crude than humorous, and, on the symbolic level (including the horse and rider motifs), the play's sexuality would have been more effective if it had been used sparingly. As it stands, it quickly becomes boring.

Other features besides the overdone symbolism contribute to the tedium. Whatever plot was there was stretched too far; the play would improve immensely if cut to half its present time. Repetition has been used successfully in drama; here it is not. A line that was funny when first stated is flat the second time and obnoxious the third.

The actors, Randi Ravitts as Belle and Tony Rust as Jesse, worked remarkably well considering their material. Rust showed few faults. He could have brought out more the insecurity that the symbolism insists on, but the problems of the play would still work against him. His weakest point appears where Jesse is supposed to be nostalgic. Yet the main errors here are the stilted lines, which didn't need to be repeated three times to sound absurd. Rust

also showed his versatility as an actor in the different secondary roles he played.

Randi Ravitts is likewise talented, as was seen in the contortions she worked on her face and body to portray Ford, the killer of James. Ravitts' most noticeable problem came in the early scenes, where Belle's playful laughter sounded more like hysteria than joy. Overall she played her character well, portraying a feverishness that allowed the sudden switches in Belle's emotions. These emotional changes make Ravitts seem less than adequate at times, but, again, the fault is with the play. Ravitts gives what the author asks for.

Jesse and the Bandit Queen eventually achieves its stated goal of a "Western fantasy" focusing on the psychological level. The means to that end reveals the author's basic talent and ingenuity along with his weaknesses. While the idea of exploring the psyche remains intriguing, Freeman was not able to completely integrate his idea with his medium. Besides "saying something," drama must be entertaining, and the tendency to monotony that exists in *Jesse and the Bandit Queen* requires that the play be reworked.

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Kamin brings silent messages to EMU

Pantomimist Dan Kamin will appear at 8 p.m. Saturday in the EMU Ballroom.

Kamin's repertoire ranges from parodies of opera and television to "dramatic comments on life and death." He portrays as many as 40 different characters in one evening, including 13 in one restaurant scene, and his characters include pickpockets, magicians, artists, children, animals and inanimate objects.

His skits include titles such as "Trip," "The Tightrope Walker," "Samson," "The Boat," "On the Ice," "The Typist," "The Astronaut," and "Escape Artist."

Kamin began performing at the age of 13 as a magician. He studied under mimist Jewel Walker, and has studied body awareness, yoga, and film mimes such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

He has performed for the Cubiculo Theatre in New York, the Mannin Street Theatre in Philadelphia, and at the Pittsburgh Playhouse.

He has also appeared on an educational television special *The Silent Art*, and on the CBS program *Camera Three*.

Tickets are available at the EMU Main Desk. Prices are \$1.50 for University students, \$2 for the



Dan Kamin

general public, and 50 cents for children under 12 years of age. This performance is sponsored by the EMU Cultural Forum.

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