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The Belle of Amherst: a review

Review by Sharon Leighton

A one-woman show, *The Belle of Amherst*, starring Laurel Smyth, was performed Nov. 7 at the Steele Auditorium.

Smyth's acting was a pleasure to watch as she portrayed the sorrows, struggles, and triumphs of America's eccentric poet, Emily Dickinson.

The stage set was well-designed and well-executed. Two small rooms suggested not only the Dickinson home-stead, but the entire Victorian Age. Great attention was paid to background detail such as the toy piano with brocade trim, the conch shell, the family Bible, the daguerrotypes on the wall. The rooms were completely enclosed, the only openings, other than to the audience being a window on the garden and a door leading to the rest of the house. This highlighted the enclosed nature of Emily Dickinson's life.

Director Erskine Smith was successful in using stage movement to maintain interest, an undoubtedly difficult job in a one-woman show with little action.

The only serious flaws in the play derive from William Luce's script. The entire play was based on the idea that the audience was a gentleman come to tea with Dickinson, who confided to him the story of her life. This dramatic device was profoundly unsuitable. People who will pour out the story

of their lives to any sympathetic listener do exist; but was Dickinson one of them? The play presented her as a shy, withdrawn woman who looked down on the village gossips; would this woman have chattered nonstop for an hour and a half? Her own poetry, quoted in the play, presented her as a sensitive person who experienced life in silence, whose only "letter to the world" was her poetry. "I couldn't bear to live aloud, the racket shamed me so," she wrote. Would this woman have told a casual visitor the truth of her ambitions, disappointments, loves, sorrows? It seems improbable.

There was also an inconsistency in the portrayal of

the poet as both a woman capable of deep devotion, a fool continually carried away by adolescent infatigations. Perhaps a study of life and work does not make this issue clear, but the play would have been more effective if either the playwright or the director had decided the question.

While the plentiful pacing of the script of Dickinson's poems was added pleasure to some members of the audience others felt that it slowed movement.

Luce did succeed in capturing the unhappiness of the poet's life and the courtly humour and sensitivity which she brought to it, a worthwhile achievement.



Committee a success

By John Dougan

The scene was set in an average board room with action centered around a table where decisions were supposed to be made.

The play dealt with a committee's unique ability to discuss and come up with decisions about nothing at all. Its members have different personalities and attitudes which serve as a foil for their lack of purpose.

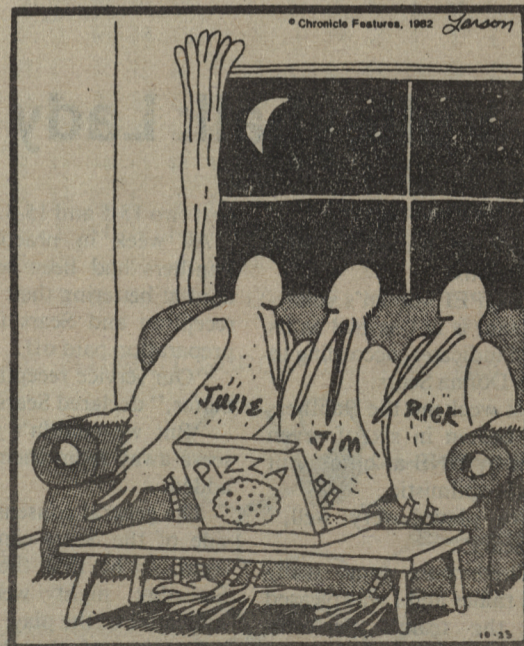
Colonel Mustard, portrayed by Jeff McGee, provided some comical relief by sleeping and spending most of his time in the room. Flann O'Brien, portrayed by Kevin Walker, also provided comedy by being inebriated, outspoken and opinionated.

The acting was very good, the setting realistic, and the comedy quite satisfying.

The play was a success, as evidenced by the turnout of students and laughter.

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



"Let's see — Mosquitos, gnats, flies, ants ...
What the? ... These jerks! We didn't order stink
bugs on this thing!"