Jules Feiffer Lectures For Poets’ Theatre

By Tom Haugh

The sight of a 35-year-old man crawling around on the floor of his home (or rather, his parents’ home) because of his jealousy of his new baby and his feelings of inadequacy, while his parents are off hiding in their bomb shelter during a civil defense alert, leads one to wonder about the present state of modern civilization.

The incident is, of course, not real, but is one of the many cartoon situations conceived by one of today’s best satirists, Jules Feiffer. This particular cartoon, however, was only one of the several brought to life last Sunday afternoon at the Sanders Theatre, when the Poet’s Theatre sponsored “Jules Feiffer and His People.”

This afternoon program was composed of many of his short cartoons being acted out on the stage, the longer cartoon, “Crawling Arnold,” also acted out, a reading and film slide showing of “Boom!” and an informal lecture by Mr. Feiffer.

Most advocates of Feiffer seem to picture him as young, bearded, rather shaggy haired, with a beard and sloppy clothes; in short, the picture of one of his own characters. Although he is rather young, he presents none of this appearance, but is rather an unimposing, amorphous man. However, he is hilariously and very bitingly funny. His cartoons, which appear weekly in the Greenwich “Village Voice” among other papers, and monthly in Playboy, have long been noted for their sharp, stingy satire.

Mr. Feiffer seems able to reduce the most imposing and pompous of issues to its true perspective, such as his famous cartoon of the astronaut viewing the Russian satellite and launching a teardrop against it, sadly ending as he walked away discouragedly, “We committed the most unpardonable of sins. We were second!”

His cartoons are normally connected with the most current issues, also. For example, I am sure that any members of the RADP who were at the performance were particularly impressed by “Boom!” This cartoon chronicles the advancement of nuclear tests in the atmosphere, and their side effects. The end comes when a scientist discovers a bomb which is capable of destroying the world. No one believes that the bomb will work, so of course, they must test it. Needless to say, it worked. The message here is rather obvious.

Mr. Feiffer’s talk chronicled briefly both his own career and the rise of modern satire. He seemed to be trying to put across the idea that we become accustomed to stereotyped cartoon situations, and that it was up to the satirist to break these stereotypes. He stated that the first “sick” comedians were called so because they showed the realistic side of nature, and those broke with tradition. However, he also noted that we have now adopted another set of stereotypes which again need to be broken, and which, he added, was trying to break at present. He seems to be very successful in doing so.

On the whole, the performance was a very good one, and well worth the rather expensive tickets which were required. The Poet’s Theatre should be lauded for their efforts.

The next presentation of the Theatre will be on “The Square,” a play by Marguerite Duras, who wrote the screenplay of “Hiroshima, mon Amour.” This will begin March 14 at their own theatre in Harvard Square.

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