Lecture at mit... Sensitivity and a quick wit

By Gene B. Chase

Why did you come to hear Jules Feiffer? To be entertained? Criticized? Analyzed? It would be in the spirit of this noted cartoonist, lecturer, critic to ask yourself why you'd do anything to such a thing. You would be one of his admirers. If he is not a paper man, nor his situations mere rhymes. Although humorous, Feiffer's vehicle is tragedy, in no way conventional or ordinary necessary for comedy. Jules Feiffer is just as good a prose as he is in his book: the gaiety of the audience response before this one. He spoke to an enthusiastic audience in Kresge last Thursday. He read his cartoons, but they suffered only slightly from the lack of being extensions, as his quick-witted replies to questions showed. This reviewer would like to think that he might publish this essay in the near future.

He criticized "the radical middle," with its creation of "respectable" extremes; those who prefer "acting right over being right," who believe one thing and act another; those who treat the problem of the machine, the thrust of the bomb as "quests" with which they are not directly involved.

Most telling were the blows he struck against his own field of success — satire, "popular because it doesn't mean anything," a field in which sensitivity "improves the quality of one's market." By questioning our faults, his character, Bernard, inept, inconsistent, indifferent, almost a louse, points out the masquerade of self-righteousness worn by the honest appealing to the masquerade of his readers.

Things are not getting better because you can't change human nature, and (maxim no. 1) all men are crooked equally corrupt. So adapt, and (maxim no. 2) be morose.

Bound by guilt, bound by circumstance, we must submit to self-examination, rebel, or die. Feiffer tied up his talk by expressing the conviction that we have already chosen the first alternative, so that now — "Satire is no longer a comment on the way we live — it is the way we live."

Jules Feiffer

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