



Excelsior, You Fathead!: The Art and Enigma of Jean Shepherd

Eugene B. Bergmann

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(Applause Books). Jean Shepherd (1921-1999), master humorist, is best known for his creation A Christmas Story , the popular movie about the child who wants a BB gun for Christmas and nearly shoots his eye out. What else did Shepherd do? He is considered by many to be the Mark Twain and James Thurber of his day. For many thousands of fans, for decades, "Shep" talked on the radio late at night, keeping them up way past their bedtimes. He entertained without a script, improvising like a jazz musician, on any and every subject you can imagine. He invented and remains the master of talk radio. Shepherd perpetrated one of the great literary hoaxes of all time, promoting a nonexistent book and author, and then brought the book into existence. He wrote 23 short stories for Playboy , four times winning their humor of the year award, and also interviewed The Beatles for the magazine. He authored several popular books of humor and satire, created several television series and acted in several plays. He is the model for the character played by Jason Robards in the play and movie A Thousand Clowns , as well as the inspiration for the Shel Silverstein song made famous by Johnny Cash, "A Boy Named Sue." Readers will learn the significance of innumerable Shepherd words and phrases, such as "Excelsior, you fathead," and observe his constant confrontations with the America he loved. They will get to know and understand this multitalented genius by peeking behind the wall he built for himself a wall to hide a different and less agreeable persona. Through interviews with his friends, co-workers and creative associates, such as musician David Amram, cartoonist and playwright Jules Feiffer, publisher and broadcaster Paul Krassner, and author Norman Mailer, the book explains a complex and unique genius of our time. "Shepherd pretty much invented talk radio ... What I got of him was a wonder at the world one man could create. I am as awed now by his achievement as I was then." Richard Corliss, Time magazine online

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