



Tom Wolfe

by Steve Kadel

The Iowa Kool-aid acid test

AMES, Iowa—A thousand people, mostly students, were sitting in the audience at Iowa State University Tuesday night waiting for Tom Wolfe. On stage were two chairs and a podium and lights shining down. Suddenly two men walked in from the left side of the stage.

"So that's Wolfe," whispered a girl in the second row.

Dressed in a white suit with vest and blue suede wingtips, the author of what many consider the manifesto of the underground culture, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, sat down and surveyed the crowd while being introduced.

In the audience people secretly clutched copies of *Acid Test*, or *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing The Flak Catchers*, or *The Pump House Gang*. Most knew Wolfe as the writer who had spent two months with Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters in California while the acid culture was being started in 1967.

Many were not sure what to expect from Wolfe. He has been damned by established sectors of journalism, such as the *Columbia Journalism Review*, for his flamboyant, subjective reporting style. Still, Karl Shapiro has called him "more than brilliant. . . a goddamn joy." They would see for themselves.

Wolfe's speech was a humorous recounting of his trip up the journalistic ladder, and an explanation of how the newest

literary form, the nonfiction novel, was born.

"After spending four years in college and five years in graduate school I suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to 'go to the real world,'" said Wolfe. "I was so desperate for a job that I nearly took a position as copy boy for the *New York Herald-Tribune* that would have paid \$41 a week."

Eventually Wolfe did work for the *Herald Tribune*, as a reporter, and found himself in competition with other staff members in what he called the feature game.

"When I was 25 everybody's psychological ace up the sleeve was the novel. By reading jackets of books in the 30's you were constantly assured that all novelists started out as dishwashers or truck drivers," Wolfe said.

The game to see who could write the best feature stories kept writers going until they got up the courage to take the plunge, quit their job for six months and "write the novel that would light up the sky," according to Wolfe.

No one realized the feature game was having any effect on the literary world until Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* were published. Then it became obvious that the techniques of fiction such as point of view, stream of consciousness and extended dialogue could be used effectively in nonfiction.

"This type of writing requires saturation reporting," Wolfe said. "You have to stay with people for days, months, even years instead of only an hour or so."

When Wolfe wrote *Kool-Aid Acid Test*, he lived with Kesey and the Pranksters for two months. It would have taken longer, he said, but the history of the movement had been recorded on tapes, films and in diaries.

Wolfe said the culture he wrote about in *Acid Test* is widespread in this country. It has had a big effect on American society.

At a reception in the home of an Iowa State English professor following the speech, Wolfe sat in the living room, surrounded by students, and sipped scotch and water. He was asked which writers he likes.

"Ken Kesey is a tremendously charismatic person and I've heard he's working on another novel. Balzac is a person who amazes me, though. I read his biography and was impressed before I ever saw a sentence he had written."

"He wrote three full-length novels a year for 20 years," Wolfe said. "I read a couple of them, figuring they would be bad novels, but they weren't. They were all tremendous!"

Wolfe said there have been too many times when he has had to write something just to keep going financially. Those days seem to be over now. For the one night appearance in Ames, Wolfe earned \$2,700.

Symposium attacks Latin American problems

In recent years scientists and humanitarians around the world have labored to solve problems like starvation in underdeveloped countries.

The search for answers to critical food and health problems will continue April 17-18 on the UNL campus during the Montgomery Lecture series.

The University will be involved in one of the first public inter-American symposiums of this type to be held at any university in the United States, according to Roberto Esquenazi-Mayo, chairman of the Montgomery Series planning committee.

Esquenazi said he has spent three years organizing this symposium, and he believes it will be one of the most important conferences ever held at the University of Nebraska. He said renowned scientists from all over the world will attend the Inter-American Symposium on the Scientific and Technological Gap in Latin America.

Funded by the Montgomery Lecture Fund and the Sperry and Hutchinson Foundation, the symposium is being presented by the UNL Institute for Latin American and International Studies. Esquenazi is director of the Institute.

He predicted the conference will be one of the most successful and significant in the history of the University. Esquenazi said he has been receiving letters from experts, scientists and humanitarians from major universities throughout the world who have heard of the UNL symposium.

"This response has been phenomenal," Esquenazi said: "I hope we can receive a similar response from the students and other members of our own community," he added.

"And the students shouldn't think this is just about Latin America. The information discussed here will apply to all developing countries."

Esquenazi cited a number of reasons why he hoped students would attend the symposium. The principal reason, he said, was to clear up students' misconceptions about the nature, extent and effect of the overwhelming problems now experienced by the masses in developing countries.

"A lot of the students talk about poverty here in America. You can imagine what it's like down there," he said.

Esquenazi also stressed that speakers will not be talking "pure science." Therefore he said students not majoring in a science, or those not knowledgeable about current scientific trends, shouldn't be afraid to come. He said the symposium will not just deal with scientific problems but also with economic and social problems.

"There will be ample opportunity for students to discuss and ask questions," Esquenazi said.

After the symposium is over, resolutions adopted will be sent to Brazil, and hopefully they will be implemented, Esquenazi said. He said resolutions,

probably to be called *The Nebraska Recommendations*, will also be sent to government agencies in the U.S., as well as in other countries.

The Montgomery Lecture series schedule is as follows:

Monday, April 17

9 a.m. Greeting by UNL Chancellor James H. Zumberger; Centennial Room, Nebraska Union.

9:15-10:15 a.m. Norman H. Cromwell, executive dean for graduate studies and research at UNL and Harrison Brown; "The Role of Science and Technology in Development."

10:30-noon Marcelo Alonso, "Trends in Science and Technology in Latin America;" and Manuel Noriega Morales, "Technological Transfer-Adaptation and Innovation."

1:30 p.m.-3:15 p.m. Arcadio Poveda; Victor L. Urquidí, "Latin American Development and the Technological Gap;" Jorge Soria, "A General View of the Present Status of Scientific Knowledge on Tropical Agriculture in Latin America;" Myron Wegman, "Applied Research in Public Health in Latin America."

7 p.m. Banquet. Speaker, Adam C. Breckenridge, UNL Department of Political Science; "The University of Nebraska in Latin America."

Tuesday, April 18

9-10:20 a.m. Henry S. Valk; Carlos Mallman, "Gaps in Mankind's Wellbeing; Argentina as a case study;" Guillermo Soberon, "Mexico's Scientific and Technological Gap and the Program of Scientific Development of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico;" Luis Manuel Penalver, "The Situation of Science and Technology in Venezuela."

10:40-noon Presentation concerning the status of science and technology in other countries.

1:30-3:15 p.m. Melvin D. George, Dean of the UNL College of Arts and Sciences.

3:30-4:30 p.m. Resolutions

4:30-5 p.m. Closing statements by Harrison Brown.



montgomery lecturers . . . Soria, Alonso, Wegman, Morales, Urquid, Soberoni, Poveda, Brown.