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"I object to the University . . ."

Dr. Leslie A. Fiedler, Professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, speaking at Hanszen College's Fall Symposium, delivered a lecture entitled "Race, Class, Sex, and the Novel" and a colloquium for the English Department; and took part in a panel discussion of his "Partisan Review" article, "The New Mutants."

Eyebrows began to rise Wednesday night, as Dr. Fiedler, a novelist himself, foresaw the death of the novel as a literary form. The basis for the novel is the oppressed or minority group, he suggested, beginning with women in Richardson's "Pamela."

Feminine

From "Pamela," Dr. Fiedler went on to cite the transformation of the woman first into a Negro, as in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," then into a Jew in George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda." The trend to retain the feminine characteristic of the hero of the novel lasted into the twentieth century, and the heroes of the modern novel have about them something of the persecuted female, no matter what their actual status.

Dr. Fiedler gave many instances of the manner in which the persecuted hero crosses the line of class or race in the novel, and in each instance it was made clear that he (or she) must assume a feminine role in order to do so.

The only love possible between a white and a Negro seems to be a homosexual one, and the modern novel has included the homosexual in its canon of "types" as well. Perhaps, suggested Fiedler, the WASP may become the "ultimate outsider." As each minority group moves into the Establishment, however, the novel tends to become institutionalized, and eventually there will be no one left to write new novels about.

On Thursday night, it became clear why the structure of society is altering to exclude the old criteria for taste and criticism. The panel, composed of Dr. Fiedler, Dr. Douglas Milburn of the Germanics Department, Dr. Gerald O'Grady of the English Department, and Geoffrey Bowman, Will Rice senior, discussed the alteration in youth.

Dr. Fiedler, discussing "The New Mutants," said that humanity stands at a crucial moment in its history. A change has taken place which is neither political nor social. The end of mass immigration has not meant the ultimate growing together of the generations, as might have been supposed, but the formation of a youth culture which does not esteem very highly, if at all, the values handed down from older generations.

Mutation

The radical difference between the two cultures leads Dr. Fiedler to speak of the change as a "mutation."

Identity has changed in its definition. No longer is it possible to expect the male to assume his traditional role as conqueror. A new gentility, born of drugs, of the new politics, of the necessity for total involvement in the surroundings has replaced the old definitions.

The term "poly morphously perversive" has been coined by Dr. Norman O. Brown to outline the type of release now sought as the youth attempts to make over his world. The drug culture can not be ignored or passed off as an isolated or transitory phenomenon. The walls are falling down or at least blurring tremendously, and the old pigeonholes are no longer capable of containing the definitions used by analysts to separate the outsider.

Dropout

Colleges are feeling the alteration intensely, as the dropout culture grows. A revolt seems to be in full force against both rationalism and traditionalism.

With that introduction from Dr. Fiedler, the discussion began. The format was that of the open-ended TV talk show, with questions from the audience forming the basis for further pursuit of the subject.

The panel was remarkably unanimous in its support of Dr. Fiedler's major premises, although Bowman objected to the use of blanket categorizations, and seemed to think that the alteration of the sexual role should not have been so surprising to one who had suggested the phenomenon himself in a book of criticism.

Radical Change

The audience grappled mightily with the changes suggested for the University. "Why," asked Dr. O'Grady, "should anyone pay money to be straight-jacketed, as one does in the University now?" Dr. Fiedler seemed to think that the structure of university education would alter radically in the next fifty years, as the student becomes more and more inclined to drop out and in, taking those courses which interested him, and leaving alone those which were either boring or not germane to his interests.

"Turn on, tune in, drop out," the suggestion of Dr. Timothy Leary, might be supplanted by "Turn on, tune in, take over," as the new mutants make the alterations necessary to take their places in society. The Establishment would reach out and claim most of them, it is true, but the Establishment into which they took their experiences and opinions would have altered drastically in order to be acceptable to them.

Live Audience

The audience remained lively, if not altogether switched on throughout the course of the evening; as Dr. Milburn suggested readings in the literature of the new culture; as Dr. O'Grady suggested new novels illustrative of the alterations in the outlook of the social being and his place in society; as Bowman clarified the doings of the New Left and of the Drug Culture; and as Dr. Fiedler fielded the gripes of disgruntled climbers into the University structure as it stands.

Finally, he was asked just what his objections were to the University.

Speaking in a low tone that rang with conviction, Dr. Fiedler said, "I object to the University because . . . it brainwashes people into accepting the values of society. I object to the University because most classes are conducted on such a level and most curriculums are organized in such a way as to breed almost intolerable boredom on the part of the students . . . I object to the University because . . . the University is established as the servant of various groups in society; especially the ruling groups of society, so that the notion of service to the community ends up in bowing scandals like Michigan State and the CIA . . . I object to the University system because it assumes that one can divide knowledge into discrete units called courses and weigh each of them so that they have a precise number of points and then add up those points until they reach some magical number and then give a degree at the end. I despise universities because like a Pavlovian dog, I am supposed to begin when one bell rings and talk 50 minutes until another bell rings and then stop . . . . I despise universities for their semitotalitarian organization . . . I despise Professors for their limited concept of freedom."

Scorn

And so it went. The audience sat enraptured as the Establishment heaped scorn upon their heads for taking the abuses of the system without flinching, becoming the machines that would perpetuate the system.

Finally, after two and a half hours, the thanks of Hanszen College were rendered to the panel, and the audience broke up into small groups debating what, if not a ninety-year wonder, should remain in the minds of all for a very long time in any event.

There is a giant asleep at Rice. We should thank Hanszen College profusely for disturbing its slumber.