

Linden in Lincoln: Changing words

By Mark Nemeth
Staff Reporter

Laundry in Lincoln is like laundry in London in that most of the fabrics washed, like language, are from certain roots, and like plants, are sometimes green and purple.

Cute Peter was washing mostly green and purple clothes at the laundry shop downtown, Downtown Laundry, when a woman in black and white came in to wash her own.

Laundry is like rent, in that by the time most Lincoln youths consistently pay for their own, they are in late childhood. It was Cute Peter's opinion that late childhood is the first half of one's 20s. Cute Peter was in that period, though he lived with his mother, and was in his seventh year of college.

He talked about and planned a project every so often, maybe every month, and had published a short story in the locally published publication Downtown Publication. The story was about a relationship he had had with the woman in black and white, Gloria, who was now inside Downtown Laundry with him.

She said hi, and he said hi, and they both waited for their clothes in a state of kinetic tension, talking little.

She had come from a special officer election of the student advocacy group, Action Never.

He'd been reading an article on language in the New York Times Magazine. The article was by James Lipton and was called "Left Out," about the universal tendency of language to make right imply right, and left imply sinister, clumsy, sneaky and evil.

At 8 p.m. he said goodbye, as did she.

Sylvia and Fred were in her head. "He's pretentious," said Sylvia of Cute Peter's friend Piper. "Let's lynch him."

To Sylvia and most of her friends, things were pretentious or else. Sylvia and Fred had talked about lynching artistes before, pushing their humor to mental limits so it might seem real and physical, and yet Sylvia had a keen sense of her own potential pretension.

"Thinks he's some kind of protege," Fred said. "Using every trick of history, language and psychology to perpetuate himself."

Sylvia laughed, and kissed Fred wetly on his naked shoulder. They had arrived at their apartment tired. On the floor drinking ice water, they had kissed lightly and made love.

"People like pretentious," Sylvia said. "It's basically non-threatening."

"I'm reading this book about GM called 'Rivthead,'" Fred said. "Now this guy is really unpretentious, he's like a factory worker."

"Huh? I don't know," Sylvia said. "What's pretentious? I feel sort of pretentious right now."

"Yah, and when you mention the word capitalism, it's like a buzz word that renders the next words pretentious, even if they're true." Fred paid close attention to Sylvia's words and moods, being in her head, always losing a little more of his own identity.

"I just want to talk about the future," Sylvia said.

"You're so pretentious." "Kiss me," and he did, and they made love and talked.

Drew Leftover was still at the New Grug Bar, waiting to order and sitting with Tom, who was still staring at Sondra, who was still gossiping with Jennifer, who was still interrupting Sondra.

The waitress came to their table and Drew ordered a Scotch on the rocks. Though most people came to the grug bars for grug, or "beer for Bohemians" as Jill said, Drew liked fire, and with fire Jolly Ranchers, he drank Scotch. Drew's straight dirty blonde hair went just past his ears.

"Hey, it's Groover! Hey Groover!" Groover was in the vicinity.

"Hey, Tom, Drew," Groover said. "Sit. What's up?" Tom said.

"Oh man, I gotta tell ya. I've been really into removing language from its text. Man, like if someone tells me their lawnmower doesn't work, I'll imagine the sound of a lawnmower not working."

"Wow. Cool," Tom said.

"Yah, it's an empowering tangent," Groover said. "I used to be into removing language from its context, but that got me into too much trouble."

"Wow Groover, you've really gone the whole distance," Tom said.

Drew felt removed from place, looked around generally, thought about the time he'd been in Lincoln, gone to the grug bar. He took a drink with an ice cube and chewed. It was 9 p.m.

Fred had said he thought in rhyme before having sex; alliteration, words like colors, then he would orgasm.

"It's always like that, Fred," Sylvia said. She whispered sweetly into his ear, "foreplay Fred," and they did it again.

Cute Peter was soon at Sylvia and Fred's. Linden was on his way. Jill would sleep through the night.

Soon they were rewinding and replaying a section of the movie they had rented that stood out, struck them as being from the same ground they walked on.

The movie, "Network," by Paddy Chayevsky, was about a television network with bad ratings. Network news anchor Howard Beale announced on the air that he would commit suicide on his next broadcast, and ratings went up.

Instead of killing himself however, he told New York City to go to their windows and yell "I'm sick and tired, and I'm not going to take it any more," and they did. Ratings went up.

The network executives saw profit in the mouth of social criticism. Beale became a mystic prophet, with his own mystic social equality news show, and criticized the corporation that owned the network. The president of that corporation was Howard Jensen.

The scene Sylvia and group were watching and rewatching was set in the expansive office of Howard Jensen, with Jensen at one end of a long, dimly lit meeting table and Beale at the other end. Jensen began a loud sermon on "corporate cosmology" in the same evangelical

tone Beale had been using on his show.

"You have meddled with the primal forces of nature, Mr. Beale, and I won't have it," Jensen said. "You get up on your little 21-inch screen and howl about America and democracy."

"There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM, and ITT, and ATT, and Dupont, Dow, Union Carbide and Exxon," he continued. "These are the nations of the world today. What do you think the Russians talk about in their councils to state? Karl Marx? They get out their linear programming charts, statistical decision theories, and compute the price cost probabilities of their transactions, just like we do."

Beale said he'd seen the face of God.

"You just might be right, Mr. Beale," Jensen said.

They watched this section four times, and began applying the remote often to the movie.

"Wow," said Sylvia. "The corporate-controlled state did a lot in the '70s and '80s to ensure the '60s wouldn't happen again, to ensure the goals of social equality could only come out in things like ads for MTV or Esprit; commodities of capitalism sold, thus controlled."

Sylvia was sexy as she said these things. Fred felt dizzy. Everyone went home after the movie was over.

Jill had fallen heavily into light sleep after she left the bullhorn she had borrowed from Sylvia in her mailbox as per instruction. Had she been awake, she might have noticed the winds rising and the weather changing.

Instead, she dreamed in coordinating colors, video images, whispers and patterns. Georges Bataille was digging through a pile of wheat germ with a spoon, making love to her and screaming obscenities. She was trying to center text inside a box, swaying, missing the center as if repelled by a magnet.

Someone said the Sex Pistols were swimming in a river nearby, and she saw TV monitors. Bataille handed her a book, and she walked counter-clockwise around it. A man introducing himself as Dr. Huelsenbeck began kicking Bataille's legs and laughing.

Upon Jill's open bedroom window the heavy rain began to fall.

Waking wide awake, Jill thought she had an idea for a song, but spent 20 minutes thinking about Linden dead instead. Yah, she liked him, she decided, and fell asleep again.

In the morning, Linden woke alone and looked outside; it was groggy. The shades looked heavy. His throat was sore. The sun was up, and the rain was out.

He started forming sentences inside his head. Becoming self-conscious of them, the way he said them, or the way they made him feel, he felt exhausted, and sat down.

After awhile, he stood. No school today, it is Saturday.

He put on Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks" and heard the sound of a bullhorn blast.

(third in a weekly series)



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