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# AUGUST PLINTH reads from **TOTAL MOBIL** and **THE WASTE LAND**

ENDLESS ACCELERATION

by  
Carston Payne

Mr. Plinth's achievement in *Total Mobil* is in catching through style and mood the nightmare of infinite acceleration. He has captured the blur of the fast car whizzing past, the rush of the waiter trying to keep up with a thousand tables, the growing appetite and the rising demands of multitudes. In the five stories of his marvelous little work, only 116 pages, he has caught the speeding up of movement which assumes planetary dimensions. His fiction is abstract in the sense that it focuses on movement rather than event: acceleration, accumulation, and enclosure rather than characterization or plot. He wants to sketch the blur of the action as it speeds up, not the object. In that sense, we may justly call him the first atomist of fiction.

Still, behind the blur of the flight forward, there are plots which readers may not perceive on a first reading. In "Shooting Up" for instance, Henry Ford comes to the house of the Indian Consul, presumably in the 1890's, during the twilight of the Wild West, to seek work. He is given a job as a waiter. But he has plans of his own, Horatio Alger plans. Ford thinks like a Horatio Alger hero; but he acts very much like the Tintoretto of Sartre's "The Prisoner of Venice"; he imagines himself the man of the future entrapped in a society which is passé, and which holds him back. He wants to plunge this slow, white-cum-Indian-cum-Spaniard society behind its "Buckskin Curtain" into the future, and as quickly as possible. He picks up the accelerations within the moving bodies of the workers in restaurants and in the Consul's house—bodies that quiver with excitement and with what I would call a kind of "negative exhilaration". They want to move faster and faster, but they are limited by animal nature: the horse, the human body, the donkey—and infinite, empty spaces, the mesas, the vast plains. In the cellar of the Consul's house he begins to devise his solution: Plinth does not let us see what it is directly, but of course we know already. The assembly line!

Plinth does not let us see what Henry Ford is designing down in his damp dark cellar, because Ford does not know himself the reality of what he is making: *total mobilization*. He does not see—or perhaps, it is suggested, he dimly *does* see—the revolution which his design will create in the behavior, cultures, and values of the world. For there are hints throughout this story that Henry does realize both the good and the evil which assembly line manufacture will bring; a kind of demonic glee drives him on. The harsh *unconscious* of his plan is expressed in his *negative exaltation*. He will crush his enemies, he will break them on the rack of his vast triumph, he will hound them down, not one of his enemies will be able to escape the net he will throw over the earth.

*No, the revenge that surrounds him on all sides,  
the being-hated which he feels spiking him and  
jarring him onward, it gives him strength, he en-*

*joys it, no, really, the combustion into new forms,  
out of no inspiration, no specific vision, but  
merely this desperation beset with hungers, this  
rage against the deafnesses which refuse him.  
His practiced eye inspects, ferrets about, nothing  
escapes him. His strength increases tenfold, deploys,  
he has a sensation of expanding, controlling  
vast areas, magnetizing them. His powerful  
muscles lift lead.*

In this sense his act is a metaphysical one as well: he is, like Marx before him, giving the world a value by changing it. He finishes his design for the assembly line like a Beethoven finishing the Ninth Symphony or a Rilke conceiving for the first time of his Angels: his Avenging Angels sing their Ode to Speed as Ford ascends the steps from his cellar to enter into the course of history.

Plinth's technique is to use the historical personage as a fictional character. He is not limited by biographical fact; he pulls the historical figure out of his context, and plunges him into an abstract and surreal context, where we see him afresh, as if for the first time. Ned Lud, the "hero" of his fourth story, "The Revolt of the Machines", was a nineteenth century English anarchist, the leader of a group called the Luddites who wished to eliminate all technology and industry from England and return to handiwork, agrarian "Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land." Here Lud is dropped down into twentieth century America, given followers like Jumping Jack Flash, Funky Chicken, and a sick-womb creature called Tchutchkis (the central figure of the first two stories, and the final one), with the purpose of fixing a device in all automobiles by stealth, at night: they slip into Ford's factory in Alcofrabas at night, and insert their implosion gadget to the accelerators of all finished cars. When the motorist passes fifty miles an hour the implosion device automatically forces the speed up to 60, 70, 80, 90, 120, 150, till the car becomes uncontrollable. Soon, all over the country, machines are reported to be "out of control" and paranoia reigns supreme. No one knows whether the next time they get in their car they will be getting into an untamed maverick, a fleeing stallion, unbroken and unbreakable. Ford himself is assassinated by a deranged worker, whose wife has been killed in a careening auto.

The "plots" hidden like an implosion mechanism within these strange, brilliant and witty stories, are enjoyable, but they are hardly what makes the stories "go". They go by themselves, almost uncontrollable in their fury; that is what makes them so powerful, and terrifying.

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AUGUST PLINTH  
READS  
THE WASTE LAND

by  
T. S. ELIOT