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Perpetuum Mobile

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Perpetuum Mobile · Carol J. Pierman

*The toucan tones lend tremendous allure—
confirmed by the wheels. Half the magic—
sustaining effects of this kind.*
—Marianne Moore

Neither lunar, fiscal, nor Gregorian,
this New Year may commence randomly,
but, if time-travel has landed you
in the Fifties, primarily in early autumn.

I grew up, as they say, on a small farm
in Ohio, where the local GM dealer
hid Chevys prior to Grand Opening Day.
How carefully it was planned.

From the moment the yellow car carrier
humpbacked up the lane, to the evening
when the new cars left, in darkness for town,
for a good wash and polish—withheld to the end

behind showroom windows papered over for drama.
I waited all year for THE NEW WONDER
NOW IN CLAY IN ADVANCE STYLING STUDIOS!
a design tensile and coiled, detailed

to spring one year farther down the road.
The real thing arrived in late August
in New Mexico turquoise, gleaming
with blue tinted glass, mirrors, and chrome—

the '58 Impala (a name fitting effect—
a lightning curve vanishing
over sensuous veldt). And yet,
there were also sensible Biscaynes

and a row of sad Del Rays
parked behind the barn. In flat browns
and shades of mouse grey, with no chrome effects—
just blackwalls! Objects of pity.

New cars came in sunlight
and left by night. Even we who hid them
never knew when next tires might whisper
through dry grass: muscle cars, hot rods, V-8s,

bound for the inevitable sales floor
where the new model cars of today
are *indigenously symbolized*.
Then I could not have foretold

how I might grow old or slower,
could not imagine the first Corvettes
growing antique, rumbling in first gear
along parade routes, with aged collectors

and local politicians at the wheel.
Not *vintage!* No, the cars of my youth
could not be looked at in that light,
not like the Model-A of Mrs. Phipps

who drove to church every Sunday,
wearing black, in a black car.
This was the New World evolving:
Technicolor, 3-D, unto Cinerama,

Hi-Fidelity, Monaural, unto Stereo,
the old stiff-jointed doll begetting
Barbie fully accessorized. It was
the Assembly Line itself, Grand Consumption,

the world and all its durable goods
coming into full color, a veritable
son et lumiere. And just as Kansas
gave way to Oz, a colorful sham,

it was the end of human misery,
the Zeitgeist itself parked in the back-forty,
snoozing behind the Rock Island hens
and terrible rooster,

with yellow grain fattening in the granary
and the futile steers Morris Dancing
beneath tilting stars. Swaying,
bellowing, they rang in the New Year.

Note: For insight into the phrase *indigenously symbolized* and other allusions, see the "Ford Correspondence," *Marianne Moore Reader*, Viking, 1961.