

Exploding the moment.

IT IS a sublime thing when the side mirror of a Ford Pinto rockets into the air, slows as it ascends, and comes to a stop at its apogee, suspended like an agnostic between heaven and earth, *supra* and *infra*. The mirror, *supra*, spinning silently, lethargically, even indolently, seems ever so much more dignified than the chaos, *infra*, from which it had been jettisoned and to which gravity, inevitably, will return it.

The mirror at apotheosis hangs in the air in quiet, calm contrast to the exponential bursts below of scant minutes prior. The first burst - from a truck on West Grand Boulevard rear-ending the Pinto in front of the Conyers Ford dealership where the Pinto driver had purchased his "little carefree car" from Henry Ford II's automobile empire - this force ruptured the Pinto's gas tank and sparked an explosive fireworks of car parts and a rhapsody of flames from which the Pinto's driver extricated himself, stumbled and fell with a clumsiness and dispassion to everything but the immediate imperative of his survival, a clumsiness and dispassion which must be forgiven. The second burst - that of flames spreading to the front of the Pinto as the mirror launched skyward - continues in tandem with the flight of the mirror. The mirror, if ever noticed amidst the eruption of Pinto parts, is quickly forgotten, but not gone, placid at its zenith, waiting for the time and location of its delivery to Canaan.

In this inferno of vehicles and prose, obtuse prose confusing in its verbosity yet precisely subordinated, imagine, then, the thoughts of the Pinto's driver, collapsed and immobile, prone on his back, warm from his burning car but ostensibly safe, as sunlight

strikes the airborne mirror at an angle just-so that creates a single brilliant glint some distant number of feet above him. An object is falling, he realizes. Imagine him trying to discern, as it gains speed, what the descending object is. Is that my *car mirror*? Imagine his incredulity that the falling mirror, nearer and nearer, is on a trajectory to hit him. Would he have time to appreciate the freakish ballistics? In the last seconds, does he see the chipped paint? Does he grasp the surreality, does he smirk at the irony, that he escaped his burning car only to be struck by the falling mirror of that car? Does it occur to him, “objects in mirror are closer than they appear?”

Like the mirror earlier, now the driver and you, dear reader, reach apotheoses. In the divine, dwindled moment when the mirror fractures his face and skull, does the Pinto driver know that his “little carefree car” had a defective gas tank? Does he curse Henry Ford II’s devotion to profit and lobbying against safety regulation? Does he know light, or darkness, or anything, *anything*, as his final fraction of a second explodes into eternity?

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Inspired by a passage in T.H. White’s trilogy, *The Once and Future King*.

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