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Marion Campbell

CITY OF BYPASSES

We are glad to live in a glass city. Our river lies wide and blue, a fabulous thing for our sails to twinkle, twinkle on. Below, a little toxicity some mealy-mouthed doomsayers would have us think.

Look how the light strikes it — amber — and you talk of shit, in these shallows — jade — and you speak of algal bloom. See how fast we run in the evacuated body of these hills. Toxicity? Get real! If we are intoxicated it is with speed: all of us everywhere observe the principle of sharks, and their suave style: breath is in motion — keep moving, keep with the flow.

We return from your old places, shrug off the sad sack of history you’d have us lug around, step lightly off our planes and slip into our freeways, forever more comfortable. Ah it’s good to be back, we say, as the wind tunnels of our city take our voices.

When I travel again through the city of bypasses, I skirt in spirals the inner precinct, wind with the freeway ramps around the mystery of the City Heart, a huge sculpture in fibreglass commissioned by the Council. Here I watch the pumping red through the flexing muscles of that heart. It’s cabernet shiraz, one of the prize exports of the coastal plain, and we surface from the undercity motorpark into Heartbeat Cafe where we can sip chilled wine red or white.

At times a renegade might lose herself in this traditional traffic with the glass, begin to prowl outside, and play for us the marauding moralist should she care to strafe us with her sentences, but we deflect these with our wit and maintain a space for cool and even perambulation. This is a form of reverie, you will understand, that we who observe the ethics of speed can cultivate at leisure. We perambulate; word-strollers, you could say. We can enjoy for contrast with the rush hour the ludic crawl. We cultivate suspenseful intonation and thus have outlawed statements. Let the ideologues perform that vulgar task. We perambulate. We commemorate, as we sip chilled wine, old Chronos, a capital fellow, whose avatars we all are, who strove to arrest the haemorrhage of self as time.
Chronos is the Founding Father of our beautiful white city. Chronos as cannibal of self, of course, we remember in awe his body, whale huge, but not singing, washed up on the beach after his demise. But he comes back; he always comes. His memorial reads OUR FIRST TYCOON BUT NOT OUR LAST.

*If I don't mine*
  *it isn't mine*
  *so never mind*
  *who came before*
  *our First Tycoon,*
  *the Father of all Miners,*
  *the Father of all Miners*
  *I mine, you mine, and we can say*
  *Nullius is yours and mine.*
  *Nullius is yours and mine.*

So goes our anthem. When the activists come in their black temper: *Enough of your deferrals: listen to the meaning of this land your miners rape.* Weary Nulliusians point out to them for archival irony the permanence of cranes dismantling the endlessly nice clean city. *Get a life, you indigenes. This is the progress of poetry. The meaning is here, we say in the perpetual renovation of the Miners' City. All the rest, before Chronos, is pre-history.*

Somewhere, doing time, in the sin sector of the city some new tycoon or *neo-tyc,* style cool executive and lipservicing fem-fatalism (you have to act executive to get a hearing here), has found her niche. She will polish up the recesses of rebellion, make things clean, and banish smearers from the media. She’s deploying her crackpot team of Thought Police. Well we say it’s a democratic city and if she wants to bring her party to the party, let her. We say we fought for her right to be hysterical and let her be, while we are making history.

Sometimes we hear below the sleeping motorcity, archaically moody, Chronos groaning beneath the elegant cranes, Chronos stirring under his monument. As if he were about to break into something pre-chronic. For the moment the cranes shift uneasily.

Some say Chronos will quake at last and send a seismic thrill through the ever-widening sprawl on the sparkling coast where *ALL-TOGETHER-NOW-WE-HAD-SUCH-A-GOOD-TIME.* The second hand is running wild and brings each time a tic to the face of collective memory. *Esto Memor!*
Will we remember to regret our own evacuation? This is tick-tock city, our numbed-out-of-toxic-shock-city where perpetual now is always caught in death's old undertow. In assuming this disguise, some hope, the neo-tyc will make a conscience speak at last, and bring us into time.

We recall that long ago we had breasts, to mother us and breasts to mother, and sometimes we long for mothergush and how how how to get rid of our silicon implants, our teflon testicles, our vaginal retreads, lycra labia, and disposable priapisms?

Too late to long to be in harmony at the kitchen sink with a Leader who loved the Queen on the wireless, too late to long for the grace of those old soapies — was that the time when I shook the velvet soap in its little wire snap-shut shaker under running water while you and Time stood still to dry up?

Outside the sirens of the Thought Police are singing; they’re rounding up ‘resistant bodies’. What are those sirens playing?

— Oh, it’s our tune, it’s our song they’re singing, my love. They’ve stopped outside our door.

What’s the plot? We ask them. Give us the spiel. The New Tycoon has sent for us, it seems. This reward for our togetherness, for our clean domesticity, must have been meant to be. It’s all right. The Neo-tyc wants a clean start with such as us.

You nod; you point. We read the charges on their dashboard terminals: it seems we’ve been framed as Resistant Bodies, Organic Smearers — that we’re already history.

The knowledge pools on our docile tongues: we taste a new toxicity.