

Tito Perdue's "The Node"

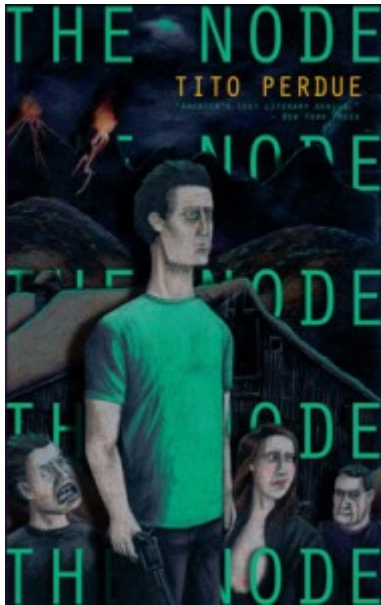
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Tito Perdue is best known for *Lee*, a 1991 novel about a misanthropic septuagenarian at war with the modern world. The novel introduced Lee Pefley, Perdue's presumed *alter ego*, who has since appeared in other novels, at different ages and even after death (as in *Fields of Asphodel*).

The Node, his most recently published novel, now out on Nine-Banded Books, is a blend of literary and dystopian science fiction, and features what might be Lee's grandson.



The action unfolds in a ridiculous mid-twenty-first-century America that is the outcome of generations of caucophobia, political correctness, degeneration, and dysgenics. It is an America where Caucasians ('Cauks') have been reduced to a dispossessed and legally disenfranchised minority, where pederasty is considered normal, where New York has been renamed Martin Luther King, where Whites suspected of ethnocentricity are imprisoned, and which is in every other respect profoundly dysfunctional, afflicted by crumbling infrastructure, rampant crime, ubiquitous pornography, environmental degradation, mass ignorance, ball-busting feminism, sartorial chaos, infantilisation, terminal multiculturalism, obsessive consumerism, and normalised self-mutilation.

The main character is a man of 44, who remains nameless and whom the author refers to as 'the boy', 'the novice', 'the pilgrim', and eventually as 'our man'. Other than his absurdly eclectic CV, the pilgrim is, in fact, fairly ordinary. He does, however, possess a somewhat independent, self-sufficient spirit. The action begins when he is forced to abandon his homestead in Tennessee, on foot, in search of propane. His journey takes him through a devastated landscape and into a dirty, overpopulated, diverse, predatory, and crime-infested city, where he visits a group of vestigial Whites in what is termed a 'node'. Their leader, Larry Schneider, has organised a clandestine movement based on the creation of a growing network of nodes—fortified ethnic enclaves—around the country, in an effort to regrow the White race, stage a cultural revival, and rebuild the world. After some time with this group, the pilgrim is charged with establishing his own node, in rural Alabama. The rest of the novel follows the boys' adventures as he joins the group, assembles his colonists, or nodists, and fulfills his assignment.

The Node has a linear plot, peppered with amusing incidents as one follows the protagonist. The attraction is in Perdue's deadpan humour, literary style, and reactionary critique.

After exchanging novels over the Summer, both Perdue and this author discovered surprising parallels in their work, even though their style and voices differ. *The Node's* social critique is comparable to *Mister* in that both authors mock the consequences of the liberal project through grotesque exaggeration, ironically contrasting refined prose against the repulsive dystopia of their setting. And both novels also make use of postmodern self-referential devices (see below).

Mister, however, is oppressive and supercilious, whereas *The Node* is wry and ostensibly lighthearted. The targets also differ: in *Mister* the primary target is the ‘respectable’ conservative, finally caught up with by the world his silence made possible; in *The Node* it is liberalism and its human product. Also, in *Mister*, the protagonist is sadistically subjected to torments and indignities, whereas in *The Node* the protagonist is treated sympathetically.

Some of Perdue’s themes of critique recur in *The Node*, to wit: the soul-destroying irrationalities of 9-5 employment; the hero’s aversion to it; comically ignorant, clownish, and aggressive degenerates; the unpleasant and degrading nature of urban life; the author’s romantic nostalgia for the Old America; the author’s love for vintage objects, which he sprinkles throughout the novel; contempt for materialism, standardisation, and what Guenon termed ‘the reign of quantity’.

Thus, when the pilgrim is required to work at a 9-5 job, filling in temporarily for a nodist, since the group needs money, he resents it and resists it. What is more, in order to blend in, he is required to attire himself as per the sartorial etiquette of the business district, which in Perdue’s degenerate world means shorts and mismatched running shoes, each worn on the wrong foot. On his way to work he is forced to navigate the muggers’ booby traps—one of the muggers’ favourite baits being a lone infant left in an upturned vehicle. And at work he is forced to submit to STRONG women—‘liberated’, ‘empowered’, misandristic, agro, chip-in-the-shoulder females so loud a telephone conversation with any of them can rupture a man’s eardrum. These women are typically skeletal, yet they, in accordance to fashion, walk around with an exposed breast.

In terms of style, Perdue favours an educated prose, occasionally with syntactically complex sentences, archaic inversions, and unusual vocabulary. His pace is glacial. The sporadic, brusque dialogue acts as counterpoint to the leisurely, extended narration. And, as in previous novels, there is a deliberate use of *leitmotif*, with recurring phrases and references to objects. Also, Perdue’s non-existent volcanoes of Alabama make another appearance here, except they now seem apt in this frigid world of lethal sunlight, oddly coloured skies, and brown snow. Another recurring theme are the links and references to the author’s own life and works: when the boy’s gorge rises, the trait is described as inherited from his grandfather (conceivably, Lee). The reference brings *The Node* into a network of other fiction by the author that partly / loosely fictionalises his life, his family, and his ancestors. Such fiction includes the forthcoming *Morning Crafts*, an unpublished manuscript of which is found in the novel. Perdue even engages in postmodern self-referencing, when he writes

Further down a comely woman dressed in blue was teaching her child the rudiments of what sounded liked the old-fashioned English of a hundred years before. Was this indeed the tongue that held sway in North America once, the dialect of Wolfe, Faulkner and Perdue?

The secondary characters in *The Node* also follow Perduesque patterns. None are truly normal. And neither are they wholly virtuous. Even the nodists, selected by the boy, are a mixed bag, individually and as a group. One speaks several languages, but is also part moth, having been victim of an embryologist’s prank. Another is a churlish, boneheaded nuisance, who is fond of beer. Yet another is persistently described as an ‘uninteresting woman’—although most seem so anyway, while the only one to attract the pilgrim’s attention in time proves a complete

disappointment. And once established, moreover, the node emerges not as a paragon of Aryan supermanhood—old habits die hard. The boy’s mission may be to help rebuild the world, but for now he has to work with what he has, with exiguous promise:

Having programmed the vehicle toward a series of nearby restaurants listed in inverse correlation of cost, the girl almost immediately fell off into a slumber in which our boy could scrutinize her face in much better detail than at any time therebefore. He would have said she derived from North European ancestry, the most endangered of all ethnoses, save only for outright Norwegians. Could he, or not, get from her a renewal of that species, the West made new, a numerous people inhabiting everything between the Rockies and Appalachian mountain chains? He knew that he could not. The resumption of fine literature, star travel, Wagnerian opera houses? Not a chance of that.

Though *The Node* is largely comical, the atmosphere remains dark, much in line with other dystopian fiction. It is ultimately a profoundly pessimistic work. Perdue’s future America is analogous with the former Roman provinces after the fall of the empire—these were effectively abandoned to their fate, Rome having exhausted its coffers and depleted its manpower and therefore having become unable to maintain a meaningful presence beyond its core, or even in its core. In *The Node*, large sections of the landscape have been abandoned, and the roads have become dangerous for travellers, peppered with unsavoury characters or crumbling outposts. Abandoned also are the formerly wealthy suburbs. The liberal upper middle class Whites that championed the liberal project have disappeared. The dollar is jocosely rejected everywhere. Perdue expects not a Spencerian collapse but a long, gradual decline—death with a whimper—for the United States, and economic preeminence for China. Moreover, he envisions any attempts at an American revival as a precarious, inglorious affair, riddled with uncertainty and frustrations, the outcome being an austere and archaic society, rather than a vibrant and futuristic utopia. Anything built upon that foundation will be leaner and harder—there is no utopia at the end of the road, but a return to old certainties, which ironically, and paradoxically, include old uncertainties too. This includes, in Perdue’s world, a return to the methods of the Old West, complete with authority founded on force and the gun:

Democracy was no good any longer, neither here nor in the country at large.

“Doesn’t work,” said he, orating to the crowd. “And can’t work when the people have fallen below a certain measure. That’s why you have me.”

The cheering stopped. One man was watching television on his wrist receiver while another had stretched out on the cold hard ground and seemed likely to fall off to sleep. The farmwives meantime had gathered in two separate knots and were gossiping happily about their trivia. Our boy could feel his gorge rising, an inherited characteristic of his.

“I’m not saying it’ll be easy.”

The tallest man in the crowd, the one in whom our man had vested his most exaggerated hopes, had turned away already and was trudging slowly homeward. Our boy counted just twenty-four subjects, all of them unproven and stupid except for himself and perhaps one or two others.

“You will notice,” he went on, “that I have begun to carry this whip around.”

“Yes, sir. We was just talking about that, sure was.” (The voice was frail and came from the back of the crowd.)

“You people. I have been here three months already and ...”

His tongue fell out. He tried to sweep it up hurriedly and put it back where it belonged. Meantime the people were drifting back to their cozy, if dilapidated homes and three-hundred-inch television sets. The whole world rested in the balance, the quality of the culture, the fate of the West. Suddenly, extracting his silver-plated revolver, he fired twice into the air, bringing their indifference to a stop.

“OK, that finishes it. The time has come to build our wall. You there, you with the boils, go and fetch your wheelbarrow. Now! And you over yonder, you’re even worse. Come on back here right now and get to work!”

And yet they continued to disperse. Hingis turned and spat at them, casting an unlovely glob of expectorant to the ground. Put off balance by that, our novice said nothing at first. Until now, he had always thought an expectorant to be someone with an optimistic cast of mind. He decided to change his tact:

“What would Larry say? OK, I’ll tell you. He would say that all he had ever wanted was to bring the people back to mediocrity again. And that’s what I plan to do, too, even if I have to...” He raised his whip in one hand and ventilator in the other. It consoled him somewhat that the varlet had come to stand by his side, his primary support at this particular time.

“Let me have that gun.”

Slowly he brought them back again. He was good, the scapegrace, with threats and guns and our man began now to see just how indispensable he might eventually turn out to be.

In short, it is back to basics: making babies, raising cattle, and (hopefully, in time) developing a natural aristocracy, combining brute force with intellectual genius. Success is not to be measured by prosperity, ‘but by the quality of men’.