

# An Excerpt from “Panoptes in the Perfumed Garden”

*You can get in but you can't get  
out. How about that! You can  
get in but it's a one-way street, a  
one-way road. It's like the  
Country. You don't just go for a  
visit—you go for good.*

—or something, though I think that's quite right, I think that's exactly what he says. I don't remember his name, and I don't think I quite agree with him—I keep leaving after all, though I don't know what I do it for. I'm not moving out to the country, and I don't think I ever would, though I've considered it—but, more importantly, I really am tired. Last night I got to sleep just fine but I do hate driving so very much—or rather, I don't mind driving at all, I just find it dismal and exhausting to sit there for hours on end—not driving, instead talking with someone and I suppose it's nice or maybe, well—I don't suppose it's nice at all, I just think I rather should find it nice. The problem is that the talk, which is the driving other than itself—it's about the most inane things, and I don't have a sense of it—I really feel like there's something missing from it all, like there's a certain quality missing—which is very important, it would be quite fine if I had that all. There's an absence or—not a sense of loss—or a particular notion of a hole—there's a thing which is not when there should be a thing that is—and when I grapple with that I find myself sort of slipping into it or resting myself down with my head or—no, I find myself looking around and rather completely sure that there's nothing there, it's opening up a door, right?—and I'm expecting my bedroom and the notion of the familiar, which I could touch—and some dirty clothes—it's laundry-day—and I find rather instead that when I open up the room there's just a great void—there's a sort of image I have of a great void at first where it's one of those advertisements that they did all the time some, maybe five years ago where there's a man with absolutely nondescript but wholly unimpeachable features standing in a vast white

room—which I perversely might call a void, which I do in fact call a void before I step back, stop myself, rethink—and it's got a sort of contour to it, right—he's standing on the void—and I think that was formative for me, it poisoned my notion of the void, in that it's rather unnerving to conceive of a void—which one can stand on—as the void in its essential form, one rather should conceive of a void which is a void, and then—the additional property, the entity that is brought forth by that conception has this additional property whereby it can be stood on, and I don't see how that follows at all, but I was exposed to the wrong image of the void in my formative years and now it's been all mucked up and there's hardly anything I can do about it unless I actively negate out that void—the real void is my void without the standing-ness, in that it would be absurd for a nondescript man to walk in to this open door and stand on the void—the void is of a nature that precludes this, in that there is a certain principle by which habitation occurs which requires the inhabited thing to express out its habitation, it makes an act of it, when one lives in a thing, that thing is acting as lived—and in that door there is this actual void and when I am sitting in the car in the passenger seat and a mouth opens up I could probably reach out my hands and pry it open into a great big gulf and inside there I'd look around sheepishly and then I wouldn't be looking around because it's a great big void—there's no looking—and now I'm realizing that thinking it's white, like as if there's an actual sort of touchable non-substance inside the now-infinite trachea—is the same sort of problem as the man standing there in the first place because that's a positive property and I can't really motivate that at all, can I, other than that I'm rather inexcusably fucked by the early-2000s advertising which was altogether too fond of the arbitrarily large white room in which nondescript men gesticulate with no thought paid whatsoever to the impact they'll have on the way impressionable youth on the daytime television watching with their wide-eyed families will grow up and then they'll be altogether confused about the void. I do wonder—what was the void like before television advertising—but I'm not sure that's very important—

but now I'm wondering, see—before television advertising, I'm now imagining something rather different, in that the nondescript man hardly seems like the sort of man who would have truck with things like the historical nature of time—I think to understand him as momentary would be a particular sort of hubris, as if a creature so inoffensive would then proceed to offend by his very creation, his coming into being—imposing himself upon the world in full, in his full form, all of it—and then moreover do the world the disservice of being

uncreated and passing from it. Rather, I find myself obligated to conceive of the man as eternal. I think he very probably had a youth, and I think he certainly will have an old age—but I do not think it is reasonable for us to collocate those things with our respective youth and old age, in that the object of those things probably have a sort of persistence—this man, nondescript as he is, would not submit himself to be caused by his youth nor to take so great a leap—presumptuous indeed—to cause himself, in the future, to come about. Being a nondescript man, though, I hardly think he could do without these things—he is after all a man, and men have a past. Men also have a future. Thus, that past and future have got to be sort of temporally collated with him as a loose independent sheaf of perpetual moments—such that if we could place ourselves with him and, standing before him or beside him, step a moment aside, and then another, and sprinting through this succession we would find ourselves face to face with an utterly unremarkable but precisely, perfectly compelling youth similarly equipped with all of his successive and antecedent moments, but sort of invariant over his relationship to them—and invariant over all relationships to them. When I attempt to conceive of this youth what comes to mind is one of those expensive pencils which is made of aluminum and has a knurled top which is rotated to retract or extend a very fine bit of lead—pencils normally have a particular temporality to them, in that the manner in which they are employed is itself the manner of the continuous proceeding of their course toward oblivion. I think a person, in the conventional sense, is probably a similar sort of apparatus—and like a person, I think a pencil is not particularly there, not particularly momentary or present, when not actively employed in its teleological role. The problem here is that the expensive aluminum pencil is rather a thing apart from itself as the consumable—and perhaps it's not a pencil at all, in that if we separate the consumable from the apparatus then, well—the apparatus doesn't write. A pencil is supposed to write. I was trying to think through the sort of conversation the adult aluminum man would have with his wife—whom he certainly has—but I'm rather incapable of that, now that I've come to a better understanding of the differences between us. I think I consequently find him more at home in the void, at least because the projection of his experience by the advertiser—now the documentarian of an eternal world—into our own local mode of comprehension need not be too representative when he is so altogether different from us. I don't so much mind. I am still distraught about the void, though, but I've got to get off this at some point since I feel like I've got so much more work to do on the subject of

yesterday's drive up—because, see, I'm going to do my best to illustrate this—imagine

## A New World

in that, more specifically, an experience consists entirely of a sort of viscous pale yellow fluid. It is a sort of oily self-adhesive reality that nevertheless slides freely off the skin, and—right, it's such that one is at neutral buoyancy, and the temperature of it is unremarkable, and then the color of it is also particularly unremarkable not so much for a lack of it but simply due to a lack of comparison—one adapts, that is. Now, let's be a little bit more deliberate—or rather, expect a deliberate composition of this, in that we will vary the temperature and density of it at various places other than the place at which one rests suspended. Accumulating it somewhere, displacing it elsewhere by cavitation, imposing micro-structure on it to produce color, heating it in a separated cavity to produce light by black-body radiation—all these things and more are applied by an apparatus of supreme technique operating at higher domain, i.e. imperceptibly responsible for these changes—all this is performed to the greatest degree of care and consistency. Eventually, all that is left is one's familiar experience of the concrete, crafted indistinguishably of a congealed, micro-variegated wax, shifting rapidly to produce the sound of speech and the gestures of fellow men. However, a layer of unaltered fluid remains about the skin—we were careful to hold that segment invariant, though I suppose I should have specified that its extent in fact proceeds infinitesimally further beyond one's immediate volume. This pocket unaltered fluid should, by its fineness, probably be imperceptible to one's occupant—only it is not. It is the surface of transition—an identifiable boundary-layer. Moreover, to the inhabitants of the surrounding Real it is instead certainly imperceptible—they are all its native, crafted occupants—to them it is birthright and the whole substance of being—

and this now poses a problem which should be fairly evident. Man, living in the new world, a full citizen of this grand domain—only he is not of like substance with his supposed fellows. He cannot eat their food—it is wax. He cannot hold the face of another in his hand—instead, when he reaches out with an open palm he touches oil to wax—as anyone would—yet he himself touches flesh to oil, which is a different sort of thing entirely. He cannot breathe their air, either—it is oil which has been aerosolized in vacuum or something like that—I'm really not quite sure, since as he moves through it, as with any other substance through which he moves freely, his fine oil shell mixes just as

freely with those surroundings. That in and of itself is salient—he cannot even be said to own or possess this personal apparatus by which he interfaces with the surrounding world, since it is a mere transient consequence of the thoroughly alien environment through which he passes. So, right—

let's have a look at this little thing here. It's a june beetle, 'nitida'—oh, and, I remember when I was younger, some five years ago, maybe nine or ten, certainly not older than eleven, I was quite close to this one boy my age, and had been for a few years—we were both otherwise quite solitary. He was—he was quite involved in the spelling bee. He studied Greek and Latin mostly—and I recall that one year he did quite well, all the hundreds of stems and roots paid off—and he was flown out with a group of similar youth to somewhere I think in Washington—in D.C., that is—to compete with them for the ultimate prize. The final objective. The totalizing purpose of his labors. Anyhow—I remember someone, I think a jittery South-Asian boy—they were all jittery, probably—he was asked to spell 'rufousity'—and this ended in his demise. The general manner in which things proceeded was first, initially—they would give the word in pronunciation a couple times. Then the contestants would ask answered questions on the subject of its etymology—ask for slower pronunciation—ask for context on language of origin—all this more or less the pronunciation and the full contents of the etymology entry that would be displayed in any decent dictionary of the sort of format wherein one displays such things. Right—after this other boy, at some point my dear friend came on television—since we were watching him on television at the time—and he was asked to spell the word 'nitid'—which when said aloud sounds much like 'knitted', mind you—which means that something is sort of bright or glistening. And—I'd forgot—they were all given example sentences which employ the word in a practical sense, in his case the proffered example was that of "the eagle's nitid feathers"—meaning "sleek, glossy", I think they said. Now, my friend did his best, and arrived at a notion to the tune of 'knited', which was altogether beside the point, and then they all said "thank you" to the judge or whatever one would call the sort of announcer figure—I think it can hardly be called judging when so little discretion is required to assess the soundness of an contestant's response. And when we were young together he and I lived not far from here, in Tennessee, and I used to come here summers—he'd be somewhere else—to spend time about the creek. And I think the way I felt for him was something like love, and probably the first I ever felt—probably the most uninhibited closeness I've had to a person—we would fight, and my nails would draw blood from his arms,

mostly—and it was a part of things—an integral whole. And we used to go to the park and cycle the trails, and there were beetles—june beetles—nitid, the fine, hard shell resplendent, maybe it would have helped, and—now it's wax, and also I haven't seen him in years—something rather dreadful I think certainly happened and I do not know what became of him, it was all after I moved away anyhow, and I am full of the oil of the world. Oh—

the oil of the world, that's what this was all about, and the wax-beetle, because the shining shell is the sort of thing where one expects it to be more than little ridges imprinted on a wax sheet. One time I made chocolate that glistened like a june-beetle by placing a diffraction grating on it as it hardened. This is the sort of reality that goes nicely in a bottle, or in a sealed container otherwise, and perhaps it is exchanged for another—

but I've become distracted again, because I'm liable to be sentimental—see—what's important here is the utter futility of conversation held over the course of a long drive. In service of this I'd like to imagine

## A Particular Evening

in which I was at a decent restaurant in a small town. It was two years ago, also in the summer—the analogue of yesterday, after crossing the border we stopped to eat. I ate alone, that time—as a consequence of the usual decisionmaking problem, wherein in this case it was assessed that finding a generally amenable consensus would be infeasible, so a temporary separation ensued. Anyhow, I went off to this fairly decent restaurant, it was a nice Vietnamese place—marginally on the side of obnoxious in a particular way only upscale Asian restaurants in America with no asian clientele can be, but not so bad—and the food was quite good, I ordered bún bò and it was entirely competent. It was unseasonably cold out, that day, and hardly anyone there was dressed appropriately, and certainly none of them wished to sit outside—so the spacious patio with tables and so forth was uninhabited, the lamps powered off and so forth. After eating and returning the check I walked outside and sat down at one of the tables—there were a series of huge plate-glass windows where the interior dining area abuts the exterior. Since it was dark outside and brightly lit inside, as I walked from the indoor area to the outdoor I became invisible to the patrons but was yet watching them—and as I exited I felt as though a great weight had been lifted from me, a sort of muddled complex of headache and more general foggy malaise was then absent, and only then was I aware it had been present at all—there was a particular, immediate sense of clarity. I find it difficult to recall the precise sense of it now—the phenomenon of it—but as I

sat down and looked at the contents of the large room I had just left, I felt as though the world had been thoroughly bisected in two—divided, in two, in all its parts. Before me was the dividing-line—a meridian of light and dark, the terminator fixed in place, static on the face of the earth. And—I was firmly apart from the scene before me, and I knew that I had moved through it as though in a dream, and that my ineptness was evident to all—a grown child, proceeding awkwardly over forever-unfamiliar terrain. Outside there was an experience of unity—and a strange experience of lightness, as though the surrounding world, the bipartite division which extended forever behind me, were suffusing me—all of it passing through me, the whole night and I was wired to it as substrate and subject and the whole mechanics of it was indisputably holy.