



Metamorphosis

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Metamorphosis

Man's equivocal attitude toward the wild animal is more than usually absurd. Human dignity does exist (it is, apparently, above all suspicion), but not on one's visits to the zoo — as when, for instance, the animals watch the approaching crowds of children tailed by papa-men and mama-women. Man, despite appearances, must know that when he talks of human dignity in the presence of animals, he lies like a dog. For in the presence of illegal and essentially free beings (the only real outlaws*) the stupid feeling of practical superiority gives way to a most uneasy envy; in savages, it takes the form of the totem, and it lurks in comic disguise within our grandmothers' feathered hats. There are so many animals in this world, and so much that we have lost! The innocent cruelty; the opaque monstrosity of eyes scarcely distinguishable from the little bubbles that form on the surface of mud; the horror as integral to life as light is to a tree. There remain the office, the identity card, an existence of bitter servitude, and yet, that shrill madness which, in certain deviant states, borders on metamorphosis.

The obsession with metamorphosis can be defined as a violent need — identical, furthermore, with all our animal needs — that suddenly impels us to cast off the gestures and attitudes requisite to human nature. A man in an apartment, for example, will set to groveling before those around him and eat dogs' food. There is, in every man, an animal thus imprisoned, like a galley slave, and there is a gate, and if we open the gate, the animal will rush out, like the slave finding his way to escape. The man falls dead and the beast acts as a beast, with no care for the poetic wonder of the dead man. Thus man is seen as a prison of bureaucratic aspect.

1929

* In English in the original. — trans.

Hyena.

